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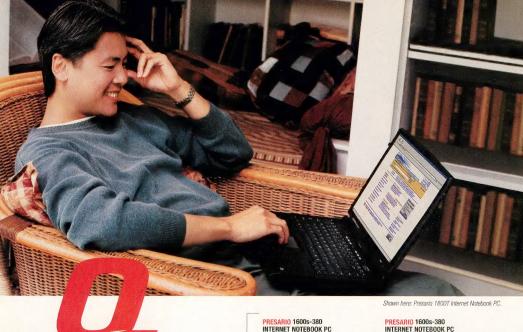
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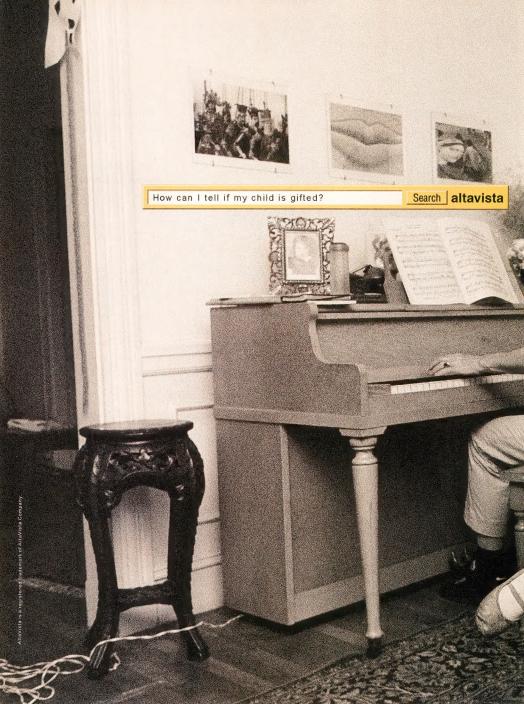
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69 101 Great Sites for Free Stuff on the Web

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The Internet puts the power of the market into the hands of us everyday folk. Fortunes will be made and lost as individuals X out the broker. Let FamilyPC show you what you should know going in. By Robert Marks

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ittleton, Colorado. Conyers, Georgia. Springfield, Oregon. Pearl, Mississippi. Jonesboro, Arkansas. Fayetteville, Tennessee. When you see the list in its entirety, you are painfully reminded that violence in our nation's schools is not an isolated incident.

We recite the names like a mourner recites a prayer—the names of the places where the unthinkable happened. At a time of peace and prosperity in our country, students are committing violent acts against their fellow students.



As violence erupted in our schools this year, our disbelief turned into soul searching: Why is this happening and what can be done to prevent future tragedies? Here at FamilyPC, where we're usually "glass half full" folks when it comes to technology, we felt a need to partake in the dialogue about whether or not computer games were a catalyst for what occurred.

The media, it seems, love black-andwhite issues. Many reports have echoed a similar theme: All computer games are equally violent. All kids who play these

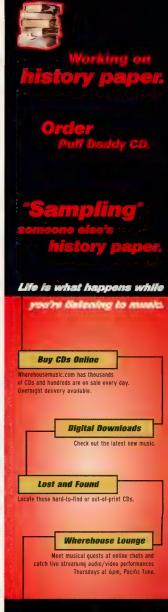
games are potential killers. All parents who let their kids play these games are bad. If only the demarcations were so simple.

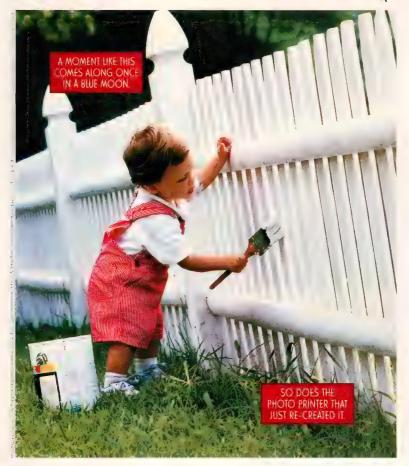
Carolyn Jabs, a FamilyPC contributing editor and the author of our cover story, "Child's Play?" (page 60), takes a more sensible approach. As the mother of three children, including two sons who love to play computer games, Carolyn is no stranger to the fears parents now face as they send their children to school. A few months after the Littleton shootings, the school attended by her 15-year-old son received a threat of violence, and the Jabs family had a stomach-churning episode as they figured out how to respond. Her advice for parents on how to cope in a world where violent games have become de rigueur is intelligent and definitely not a "onesize-fits-all solution."

And lest we forget, for every kid led astray by the darker side of computing, there are hundreds and hundreds of uplifting success stories. There are kids for whom technology has been a motivator, a way to express themselves creatively, an outlet for their passions. And there are families who have become closer and much more open because technology facilitates so many new ways to stay in touch.

We can't change what happened in schools like the one in Littleton, but we can use those events to begin the important conversations that will help us heal and move on. As we plummet toward the next century, we at FamilyPC take very seriously our responsibility of guiding parents through the promise and the peril of raising the first generation of digital kids. We hope you'll join us in the dialogue.

-Robin Raskin





What makes this printer one in a million? Start with the way it made this once-in-a-lifetime photo. Flawlessly. Quickly. In fact, in just minutes, the EPSON Stylus^a Photo 750 ink jet printer delivered all this rich color by combining six inks for the smoothest gradation and perfect skin tones. And with 1440 dpi, no printer gives you more detail—just take a look at those blades of grass. It's no wonder your photos will end up on the mantle. Come to think of it, this printer might too.

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Only Epson® printers have the PerfectPicture® Imaging System for: 6-color printing, 1440 x 720 dpi and quick-drying inks • Fast color printing on any paper—snapshots in 6o seconds • EPSON Digital PhotoLab® software bundle with Polaroid PhotoMAX Pro, ArcSoft's PhotoPrinter, ArcSoft's PhotoBase, plus more • PC/Mac/USB compatibility • One-year Epson Exchange limited warranty. For more information, call 1-80o-GO-EPSON or visit www.epson.com.



Epson Stylus Photo 750 Best for photos

Who Ya nna Call? FRED

The digital revolution needs someone willing to do the install.

ou've got to love the folks who spearhead the PC industry, for they are the eternal optimists. With home PC sales slacking off, they are already dreaming up the next scheme.

What's next is the wired home, the convergent universe, and the broadband revolution. They foresee a home where multiple gizmos dubbed information appliances-that are much more task-focused than PCs, all talk to one another. The vision is based on a home in which everything from your living room curtains to your toaster oven is networked together

and controlled by a smart information server.

If all of this sounds a bit like science fiction, it's not. Many of these products exist today and even work as advertised. There's just one problem: None of these products is particularly easy to set up, and getting them to communicate with each other makes the Tower of Babel look like the model of clarity.

Yes, through this industry's tireless efforts, there are products aplenty, marketing like crazy, and some truly great innovations. What's missing in this digital revolution, stage two, is the workers to make all of these things work.

Know a Jack of All Trades?

For argument's sake, let's just say you wanted to turn your living room television into a digitally based, PC-controlled theater. This might involve adding extra speakers for surround sound, a Dolby Digital 5.1 receiver, and a DVD player. It might involve using ReplayTV or TiVo, two nice products that turn plain old TV-watching into a digital experience. It might involve using your PC to serve up new music based on MP3 formats, and tossing out your old CDs. Maybe it's as simple as gettting a faster connection to the Internet so that you can experience the magic of an instantaneous, always-on connection with your entertainment system and order your movies on demand.

Pretty exciting stuff. But who's supposed to get this up and running? My husband and I recently did the home theater thing. He's pretty good at these things and still it took four trips to RadioShack and a complete rewire of our entertainment console.

Next, we're re-doing our kitchen. The contractors, electricians, appliances, and cabinet makers have all been carefully selected. The only part that we feel totally ill-equipped to





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Double Click

cope with is the wiring for the Information Age. (Yes, I want an Internet connection in the kitchen for recipes and grocery shopping).

What do you look up in the Yellow Pages when you want to start converging? Computer installations? Electronic wizards? Know-it-alls R Us? This emerging service area doesn't even have a word to describe it—yet it's critical to moving this industry forward.

The missing link in the digital revolution is service. And the most natural home for this fledgling business is traditional computer retail. Retailers such as CompUSA and Electronic Universe have been fretting, sweating, and whining as they lose market share to Internet sales. So, what if you could go to these stores and get your high-tech installations? What if they put you on a service contract to take care of your wired home? What if they knew about specialized cabinetry and furniture designed for wired homes? What if they asked if you wanted automatic stock quotes, a wake-up call, or a smart shopping card in the kitchen, and set you up accordingly?

Of course, service will require the skills of teams of people. First, the broadband installer will come to connect your home to cable, DSL, or satellite. Next, the home-network person will connect all your appliances inside the house. The software guy will then deploy the apps that turn your lights on and your heat down. The audio guy will make sure it's high fidelity, and the TV guy will make sure that the digital movies fly on the big screen. The trick is to get these folks all under one roof.

Retail is one answer, but it's not the only possibility. Everyone from cable installers to stereo salesmen to architects can make this a specialty. Whoever figures out the business model is going to rake it in, because lots of us are salivating over the prospect of a wired, digital home.

Dustin Hoffman was too busy being seduced by Mrs. Robinson to really take note, but the rest of us will never forget "Plastics," the sage career advice that he chose to ignore. If I were giving advice to Benjamin today, I'd be whispering "Service" over those cocktails. But it will probably go unheeded here as well.

A Convergence Sampler

Think I'm crazy to worry about who will wire my digital home? Check out some of the emerging products.

Tivo (tivo.com), ReplayTV (replaytv.com)
These devices are personal
digital TV recorders that
can record television
programming and do
things like pause and
rewind. They also let you
interactively search for
what to watch via downloaded schedules. People
are calling these browsers
or portals for television.

WebTV (webtv.com) This network service from Microsoft works with your WebTV unit (a box you hook up to your television) to turn your television into an Internet station. You can shop, email, and browse, as well as watch some great TV, thanks to downloaded programming guides and new links from the TV show to the Web.

ShareWave

(Sharewave.com)
This (thankfully) wireless technology lets you turn your PC into a TV and your TV into a PC by networking the two.
ShareWave uses the term Multimedia Furnace to describe the central hub on which they build their technology.

CIDCO's Screenphone (www.cidco.com), iPhone

(www.info gear.com)
These complete phone/email stations look and act
like telephone answering
machines and have builtin graphical displays that
let you surf the Web as
well.

Creative Labs NOMAD (www.nomadworld. com), Diamond Rio (diamondrio.com)
These are the digital equivalent of the Discman. You can download MP3 music from the Internet onto your player and take it with you everywhere. (Bonus: These slim "music players" don't skip.)



Introducing the all-new Mazda MPV.

We've changed the way you look at a minivan.

Starting with the fact that you'll look ot a minivan. Its stylish design, with inventive new features, makes this the only

Side by Slide" minivan you'll ever want to be seen in. A Side Seats

by Slide" 2nd-row bench seat easily slides aport
to create captain's chairs. The Tumble-Under"
3rd-row seat folds down flat to hide away or
flips backward to become a tailgate seat. A CO
player that comes standard will keep everyone

Tumble-Under" Seat Hides Away

humming along on family trips.

And with roll-down side windows in the dual sliding doors, it even makes life

Seat Faces Front or Bock

Roll-Down Side Windows easier for the family dog. All these innovations come attractively priced at \$22,880. To learn more about the all-new 2000 Mazda MPY, visit www.mazdausa.com or call 1-800-639-1000.





You can't win if you don't register. For more info, go to www.shabang.com/million





n 1998, there were more than 70 billion long-distance calls made in the U.S., netting long-distance carriers \$40 billion in revenue. But this picture could change radically if the Internet were to become *the* long-distance carrier, letting you talk across it for free.

Using the Internet as a voice-communication device is not a new idea. But, voice communication over the Internet has been about as reliable as using two cups and a piece of string. Take Yahoo! Messenger, for example. This utility, at messen ger.yahoo.com, allows two people to "chat" over the Web, but only one person can speak at a time. Plus, there's a noticeable delay in transmission that makes you feel like you're talking with someone in outer space.

Presto Change-o

A new breed of Internet voice programs are on the horizon, and chief among them is Firetalk, which is free at www.firetalk.com. Once you and your friends have installed it, you can have clear conversations or conference calls using a 28.8Kbps (or better) modem. Of course, you each must have a microphone set up as well. The speakers built into your PC

will suffice for delivering sound. Delay time is still an issue, but Firetalk eliminates that your-turn-my-turn nature of Internet voice calls. There's no need to press any buttons, and everyone can speak simultaneously. It's closer to talking on an actual phone than anything else we've seen.

Still, the Internet as a telephone is a long way from commonplace. "There are two reasons to make an Internet phone call," says John Jainschigg, editor-in-chief of Computer Telephony magazine. "It's free, and it's fun. Expect to reach your party and to have decent sound quality, but, because of the lag time, don't expect to have a typical conversation."

Imed one true

If you're not ready to tackle Internet telephony, here's another new idea. RocketTalk (www.rockettalk.com) is a free program that lets you e-mail your message in a sound file, which your recipient downloads and plays. It's not the same as a phone call, but it's a start. And once your far-flung Internet correspondent gets used to the sound of your voice, a Firetalk chat may be just around the correr.

-Bob Strauss

Keeping Pace

Going Home

These online resources will help you get your parents settled.



efore someone you love joins the 1.5 million people already living in nursing homes, take some time to do a little Web research. A great starting point is McKnight's Long-Term Care News (www.medec.com/ltcn), where you'll discover, among other things, the differences between nursing homes, assisted-living programs, sub-acute care, and adult day services.

If you decide on nursing homes, the most common choice, go to Senior Living's Nursing Home area (at seniorliving.about.com, click on Nursing Homes), for tons of helpful links, including checklists of questions to ask staff members and tips to help you rate each home. You might want to print out the checklists to take with you to on-site visits.

At the American Association of Retired Persons' site (www.aarp.org), you can familiarize yourself with the Nursing Home Reform Amendments—little-known federal facts that protect the rights of nursing-home residents—and the Admission Contract. The admissions process is nerve-wracking and time-consuming (not to mention legally binding), so keep this information handy.

For a more personal viewpoint, visit Therubins.com (www.therubins.com), a site created and maintained by two brothers who placed their mother in a nursing home. Through poignant articles exploring every aspect of the elder-care experience, the brothers share their intimate knowledge. "Selecting a Nursing Home" is a must-read, both for its emotional impact and listing of nationwide association phone numbers.

Enter your city and state at Nursing Home Info, a nationwide directory (www.nursinghome info.com), and you'll get the addresses of nursing homes in your area. You can also go to the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (www.aahsa.org) for a state-by-state listing of its members' sites, where you can either take a virtual tour or pre-apply.

Regardless of how much online research you conduct, you must visit a home in order to see the living conditions firsthand. By doing some of the legwork before you arrive, you'll have more time to concentrate on the details, like whether the staff members greet everyone with a smile and if there's

enough sunlight in the bedrooms. These are important things no home should be without—wherever home may be.

-Michael Griffo

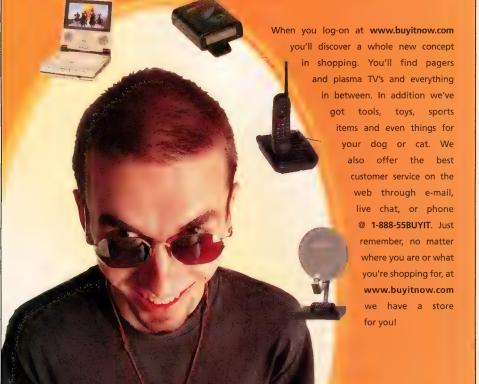
It's a New Generation

ThirdAge (www.thirdage.com) is a site designed for members of the sandwich generation: those taking care of their children and their parents at the same time. There they can talk with other families in the Caregiver's Corner chat room, hosted by Beth Witrogen McLeod, an expert on aging; and read her bimonthly column (www.thirdage.com/family/caregiving), where she profiles ThirdAge members and offers solutions to their everyday problems.

Dentists Are Going High Tech

If you're concerned about x-ray exposure, ask your dentist about computerized dental radiography (CDR) systems—x-rays without film. They place a special sensor in your mouth, and two seconds later the x-ray image appears on a computer screen. Best of all, it uses 90 percent less radiation than conventional x-rays.

Get Plugged In





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Keeping Pace Money

Estate Planning

It's never too early to plan for the inevitable.

awyers call it estate planning; we call it "keeping money in the family." If you don't do it, someone else will, and you might not be happy with the results.



Estate planning means writing three essential documents.

- Make a will to specify the distribution of your assets when you die. Without a will, dispersing your estate will take longer and cost your heirs more. And it's usually in your will that you name legal guardians for your children.
- ② Create a living will to describe your medical-care preferences in case you're incapacitated.
- Produce a durable power of attorney to designate the person responsible for handling your affairs when you cannot.

Do You Need a Lawyer?

Lawyers say yes. Software makers say, not really. Estate planning can be complicated, especially when you start to acquire multiple assets—property, stock portfolios, pensions, and other valuables. But in some situations, the do-it-yourself tactic works. And software can always help you prepare and save

time before you get to a lawyer's office.

One way to see if you're ready to tackle the task solo is to take the MoneyCentral Retirement Make-a-Will Quiz (mon eycentral.msn.com/articles/retire/will/tlwillq-asp). If you fail miserably, brush up by checking out the resources listed under "Learn more about estate planning."

Plan on the PC

A great starting place is MoneyCentral's "12 Easy Steps to Preparing Your Estate Plan" (moneycentral.msn.com/arti cles/re tire/estate/1230.asp). But the Internet lacks the complex tools necessary to actually draft documents. For that you should get estate-planning software, even if you already have a lawyer.

The best overall estate planner is Broderbund's Quicken Family Lawyer 2000 Deluxe (www.broderbund.com; Win95/98

and Mac; \$59.95). This program's top-notch will maker conducts a virtual interview, then plugs your answers into the document. Just as important, its Estate Planner 2.0 module guides you through tutorials as you create a personalized strategy.

Hungry for More?

For a more thorough education about estate planning, bookmark these resources:

- ★Estate Planning Guide (www.dtonline.com/es tate/cover.htm) takes honors as the single-best online guide. Start here.
- ★Crash Course in Wills & Trusts (www.mtpalermo.com) may be hard on the eyes, but it has valuable information and advice.
- ★Wills and Estate Planning (www.nolo.com/ChunkEP/ EP.index.html) excerpts bits from several of Nolo Press's estate-planning books. Make sure you check out the section on estate and gift taxes.

-Gregg Keizer

Star Stocks

Buy Pitt or sell Barrymore?

How about owning a hunk of Harrison Ford? At the Holly-wood Stock Exchange (www.hsx.com), you get \$2 million in phony bucks to invest in celebs and their movies. Not only is this free and tons of fun, but since it's run just like a real market, HSX is a super way to introduce kids to basic investment concepts.

Are You Credit-Worthy?

Avoid nasty and humiliating surprises—loans denied, rental agreements rejected, even job offers canceled—by checking your credit rating once a year or so. You can request a report from the major credit agencies, Experian, Trans-Union, and Equifax, for \$8 each (sometimes less), or for \$29.95 you can order a three-in-one report from online services such as iCreditReport.com (www.icreditreport.com).



With enough knowledge, any problem can be solved.

When Bose® began building factoryinstalled music systems for cars, conventional wisdom believed the automobile environment was much too hostile for true high-fidelity sound. But we embraced the research challenge of developing. smaller, lighter, more efficient equipment. Automatic functions. And through it all, far better sound. That knowledge creates better systems for your home, too. Today, the single piece of Bose equipment shown on the left, about the size of a laptop computer, replaces a shelf full of conventional components. Knowledge. It's the foundation of every Bose product.

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n her 12 years as a flight attendant for US Airways, A.G. Dunham learned a thing or two about kids flying solo. Dunham, the air-travel expert at About.com (www.about.com), dealt with more than her share of bored grade-schoolers and rowdy teens. She learned how to keep kids happy while they're in the air.

In 1998, more than 7 million kids flew alone in the U.S. "Often, parents don't prepare their kids properly," Dunham says. "They put them on the plane with nothing to do, and they think the flight attendants will entertain them."

Before hugging Junior good-bye at the departure gate, Mom and Dad can do some planning to ensure a smoother ride. A good place to start is at Dunham's About.com column, "Plane Facts on Kids Flying Solo" (airtravel.about.com/library/weekly/aa110198. htm). Dunham recommends arriving early at the airport to fill out the necessary paperwork, and packing a goody bag with coloring books, dolls, or video games. If possible, pre-board the plane with your kids, so you can introduce them to the flight attendants and show them where the lavatory is located. Dunham's site also provides a useful chart with the airlines' minimum age requirements and fees for unaccompanied minors.

You can read more about solo flying at, of

all places, the Automobile Association of America Minnesota/lowa (www.aaaminnesota-iowa.com/information/safety/flying-alone.html). Sprinkled with colorful illustrations, this primer gets its point across with humor and wry nuggets of advice ("A little kid, a little cup, and a little turbulence: good reasons to dress your child in comfortable, washable clothes"). The AAA also recommends that parents discuss the strange noises planes make, lest their young ones get nervous in midair.

Most major airlines include information about kids' travel on their Web sites. American Airlines (www.aa.com) and United Airlines (www.ual.com) provide succinct guidelines; Southwest Airlines (www.ifly swa.com) offers more detail, posting its SWA Club enrollment form so parents will be prepared to fill it out at the airport. The Continental Airlines site (www.continen tal.com) has information about the Young Traveler Club, where kids in certain airports can gather before or between flights, under adult supervision.

According to Dunham, most flight attendants will go out of their way to make kids feel comfortable. But think how much smoother the flight will be if you and your kids feel comfortable before the plane takes off!

-Bob Strauss

Concierge, Please

Where on the Web can you find information from Conde Nast Traveler, Frommer's Travel Guides, and Fodor's Travel Publications all in one place? At Concierge.com (www.concierge.com). It offers everything from restaurant recommendations, currency-exchange rates, weather reports, and festival listings on more than 500 destinations.

What's the Worst Part of Traveling While Pregnant?

In a recent poll at www.baby center.com women said: Constantly needing 40% a bathroom

Fatigue 24% Swollen feet 8% Worrying about 7% early delivery

You can fly on commercial airlines without restriction until your third trimester, when you may run into some restrictions. For a chart of airline policies, go to www.babycenter.com/general/6976.html.

NOTE - CROSS OUT ENTIRE LINE WHEN RECEIVED AND RE-USE UNTIL ALL LINES ARE FULL.

DEPARTMENT

TEACHER'S APPLICATION

FULL NAME:

Yoda

PLACE OF RESIDENCE:

Planet Dagobah

PHOTO (optional)

SEX: (M) or F

MARITAL STATUS:

single

YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

852

DRIVER'S LICENSE NUMBER:

N/A

EDUCATION:

Master of Jedi Training Doctor of Force Theory

REFERENCES:

Qui-Gon Jinn, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Anakin Skywalker

HONORS AND RECOGNITIONS: Served as a senior member on the prestigious Jedi Council. Renowned ambassador for peace and justice in the galaxy. Voted wisest Jedi Leader (record number of times).

FAVORED CURRICULUM:

STAR WARS: Yoda's Challenge - a CD-ROM full of fun and challenging activities that keep young minds engaged for hours. Teaches skills like critical thinking, math, reading and rhythm. Best suited for ages 6-8.

Supports personal philosophy to seek wisdom by doing.

ADDITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND/OR STRENGTHS:

Gentle, patient and kind. Possesses the wisdom of the ages. Adored by kids. Advocates non-violence.

HOBBIES:

Levitation, reading, meditation and music.

STAFF COMMENTS (do not write below this line)



Teaching style seems perfectly aligned with ours. Emphasis is on freedom, self-discovery, learning by A FORCE FOR YOUNG MINDS doing and choice. (not rules!) When can be start?

www.lucasleaming.com

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Hello, atch out, Ken! Barbie's been hangin' with the

geeky guys. The Apollo P-1220 Barbie is the first color nkjet designed to make technology more fun for young arls. Complete with glitter-pink accents, Bar-Die Magic Hair Styler software, and Barbie decals, the low-end printer sells for \$79. Can we expect a Mia Hamm model next for all the soccer fans? Get details at www.myapollo.com.

-Lauren Simonds



Why Does it Take Two Weeks?

An under-the-covers look at shopping online

ick, pack, and ship, Sounds easy, but it's not. A flurry of activity takes place behind the scenes from the time you click the Order button at your favorite shopping site to the moment your purchase shows up at your house. Here's a peek at how it all works.

- 1. You visit a shopping site looking to buy something
- 2. Once you find what you want, you put it in your shopping cart and go to the checkout, where you type in your credit-card number.
- 3cx. The site sends your credit-card information to its transaction-processing service, which passes along the information with the details of the shopping's site's merchant account.
- 3b. The shopping site simultaneously notifies the warehouse that will fulfill your order (sometimes run by the site, sometimes not) to prepare the item for shipping or to get it from the supplier as soon as possible.
- 4. The transaction-processing service sends your credit-card information to the paymentprocessing network that the shopping site's bank works with for authorization.
- 5α. Once the payment processing network grants its approval, that OK gets transmitted to the warehouse, giving the "go ahead" to ship your package, assuming that it's ready to ship. Any delays you experience in getting your package happen here.
- 5b. After the product ships, the payment-processing network charges your account and credits the store's bank account, completing the transaction.
- 6. Your item travels from the warehouse to your house, using whatever shipping service the site offers or you specify. - David Lidsky





You think the world of your kids. And then some. At toysmart.com, we offer thousands of toys and children's products at excellent prices. "Good toys," to which a child can return and continually invent new ways to play.

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It's dusk. Approaching runway 2-left, a dangerous storm system is dead ahead. Three planes circle, with a 777 right behind you. A flash of lightning, Thonder, A jolt. A downdraft.

Your ATC signals you're off course. Do you bank left? Or continue your approach? Experience the true feel of piloting an aircraft as you take the controls in the most realistic flight environment ever. You'll learn all the skills of flying through pulse-quickening challenges. Flight Unlimited III. A real seat-of-your-pants flying experience. Where the next decision could be your last. For more information, visit www.flight3.com.



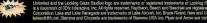
Raytheon Aircraft





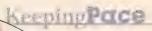












Five Minutes With...

ost of us know Rob Reiner as the director of such wonderful films as When Harry Met Sally, The Princess Bride, and The American President. Some of us remember him as "Meathead" from the TV classic All in the Family. But did you know that he's the inspiration behind the I Am Your Child Foundation and Excite First Years? FamilyPC recently spoke with Reiner about his latest pet projects.

: Tell us about I Am Your Child and Excite First Years

and early development, and whenever a new member signs up, Excite donates \$2 to I Am Your Child.

A I Am Your Child is an organization I founded two years ago to promote public awareness about early-childhood development. Since the Internet is a great way for people to get information, we teamed up with Excite to create Excite First Years (firstyears.excite.com). It's an online resource with information on pregnancy, adoption,

:The Internet has been revered and reviled. How do you feel about it?

A. I believe that the Internet is a too for information, not for ife. It's a convenient way to buy movie tickets, but it's not a substitute for the interactions we share with each other and with our children. When my family plays a board game, we're engaging each other. I haven't seen a computer create that same kind of interaction.

Q. But don't you think computers help us do some things more easily?

A: Absolutely! Our nanny does everything online—she even trades stocks on E*Trade. My son Jake makes everyone's birthday cards on our computer and uses computers at school. The people in my office use them constantly. Although I rarely use one, I realize its value.

Q. You've surfed the Web a bit. What do you think about children being online?

A: We need to help children balance Internet use with other social activities. The brain organizes itself through emotional and physical interaction with people, but the Internet is a one-on-one experience. By going online instead of meeting people, we are becoming more isolated. If we're not careful, technology will pull us further apart.

Q: Then why did you go online with Excite?

A:On the Web, there's quality information and lots of clutter. Search engines help people find the quality. The Internet is like television was in 1953. Not many people have it, but within five years, everyone will have access through TV. Then, it will be the most powerful tool known to man. I needed to make sure our information is a part of that.



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KeepingPace

Trick or Treats

yen if you're not a candycraving 9-year-old, you can still enjoy Halloween. We've found sites for every member of your brood.



Child's Play

Bone up on Halloween safety tips at A Webicurean Halloween (www.webicure an.com/halloween). At Kids Domain (www.kidsdomain.com), play online games, do holiday word puzzles, and get step-by-step instructions for craft projects like pumpkin painting. More advanced family artists will enjoy Ben & Jerry's skeleton decoration (www2.benjerry.com/ halloween/crafts.html) or the Haunted House at Absolutely Halloween (www.geocities.com/ Heartland/7134/Halloween/hall.htm).

Hallo-Tweens

Want to bond with an aloof 12-year old? Log onto Halloween Carols (www.night.net/halloween/halloween-carols.html-ssi) for classic Christmas melodies with hip Halloween lyrics. With songs like Humphrey the Blue-Nosed Pumpkin to Ghosties We Have Heard On High, this musical site will keep you laughing for hours. Dare to entertain your neighbors with door-todoor scare-oling.

For the Grown-ups

Entice your better half to join you for a swampy bubble bath with a Romantic Love Coupon, courtesy of Lovingyou.com (holidays.lovingyou.com/octo ber/treats.shtml). If a swamp's not your thing, cuddle up with a great silent scream, like the 1925 version of Phantom of the Opera, from bigstar.com (www.bigstar.com). And if you're dressing up with the kids, Wild Eyes (www.wild-eyes.com) has contact lenses that resemble zombie and cat's eyes, among others, that will make you a vision of horror. -Michael Griffo

veryone complains about spam, that unsolicited e-mail that fills up your in-box faster than you can say "Free money!" What's an e-mailer to do?

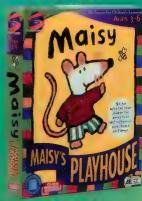
There are two ways to block spam. First, Internet Service Providers compile lists of known spammers and use the lists to block junk e-mail from arriving in your in box. AOL does this automatically; other providers, such as MindSpring, offer it as a service option. Second, you can use a filter, such as AOL's Mail Controls or Spam Exterminator software, to decide who is allowed to send you e-mail.

Unfortunately, neither method keeps you spam-free. Skilled spammers change addresses, so lists are quickly outdated. And filters might block mail from a long-lost relative or old friend.

To truly can spam, ISPs would have to sort through your e-mail-a violation of First Amendment rights. Some organizations, like the Coalition Against Unsolicited Commercial E-mail (CAUCE, www.cauce.org), are asking Congress to pass a "junk e-mail" law. Similar to the junk fax law passed in 1991, it would forbid spammers from altering e-mail headers to get past filters, and require that such e-mails be clearly labeled as advertisements.

Is it time to pass the junk e-mail legislation? Drop us a line at fpc_pace@zd.com and let us know what you think. -Emily Friedlander

Make a PC Play-Date Wieli Maisy Maisy's "can-do" agproach is the inspiration for har first-ever CD-ROM Kids help Mility clean, paint, mix. much and no much more. Har playhouse abounds with gigglen and surprises.



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ach week, new sites pop up to relieve you of your hard-earned dollars. Here are some of the latest:

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Eve.com: www.eve.com. At this upscale beauty site, you'll find cosmetics, plus skin care, fragrance, and bath products from more than 50 companies, including Elizabeth Arden, Benefit, and Urban Decay. Even better, eve.com shows step-by-step makeovers, with links to products used, and

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TheDormStore.com: www.thedorm

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fewer hours to look after a child or children. docusoap: a television program that combines documentary style with

> elements of soap opera, e.g., by showing the personal lives of people at their workplace. gonk[slang]: to lie about something or embellish the truth, especially in an online conversation in a chat room. Are you gonking me? keypal: somebody with whom

regular e-mail is exchanged. nose stud: a small stud worn for adornment in a hole pierced in the nostril or septum.

vadda vadda yadda [slang]: boring, trite, superficial, unending talk. Just a lot of yadda yadda yadda on the talk shows tonight. [slang] used in speaking as a filler for unstated material or to indicate boredom or distaste for things others are saying or have just said. "We chewed it over forever...yadda yadda yadda, you know, nothing important."

eave it to Microsoft to supply us with new words in addition to software. Encarta World English Dictionary (www.microsoft.com/ encarta), the first newly written U.S. dictionary in 30 years, hit the stores in August. Some examples: daddy track: a career route taken by a

man, reducing his chances of career

advancement by working flextime or

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A Ten-Minute Costume

The Great Pumpkin

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his project is really simple. Even if you don't consider yourself an artist, we urge you to give it a try. Let your kids get in on the act by having them design their own one-of-a-kind pumpkin face. We used the drawing tools in American Greetings Crafts Deluxe to create the features for our pumpkin. But you can use any graphics program that can draw, rotate, and group geometric shapes like triangles, ovals, and rectangles-such as Microsoft Graphics Studio Home Publishing 99 or Art Explosion T-Shirt Factory.

Using the traditional shapes-three triancomputer and gles and a jagged mouth—guarantees that everyone will immediately recognize your design as a Halloween pumpkin. For ideas to make your pumpkin scarier, or sweeter, see the sidebar, Different Shapes, Different Faces. If you're pressed for time, or just don't feel inspired, download our completed drawings from the FamilyPC Web site (www.familypc.com).

Kids and the T-shirts they wear come in dif-

ferent sizes. So we came up with a few tricks to make our pumpkin face look good on any Tshirt from an adult extra-small to an adult extra-large. If you plan on escorting your trickor-treater, why not get in the spirit and make a shirt for yourself?

When you create your own drawing, feel free to change the size or play with the rotation of the shapes. Don't try to make a perfectly symmetrical face. The pumpkin will be more interesting, and more truly your own, if you're inexact.

In addition to your graphics software, here's what you'll need to bring your pumpkin to life:

- An orange cotton or cotton-blend T-shirt (or sweatshirt)
 - T-shirt transfer paper
 - A pair of scissors
 - An iron
- Polyester batting (or any handy stuffing material such as wadded newsprint, cloth scraps, or bubble wrap)
 - A sash to keep the stuffing in place



Step By Step

Open your graphics program and create a new document. Make sure that the project is for a full 8½-inch by 11-inch sheet of paper, and that it is in the landscape orientation (wider than it is tall).

Start with the pumpkin's mouth: Draw an oval that's approximately 9½ inches wide by 6 inches deep. Fill it with black and move it to the bottom of the page. Now draw a second oval that measures about 9 inches wide by 31/sinches. It should overlap the black oval. Change the fill color to white. And, as shown in Figure 1, rotate and move the white oval until you like the shape of the mouth. When you're

satisfied with the effect, hide the outline of the white oval, either by coloring it white or choosing a line style of None.



Next, it's time to grow some teeth. Start with a small white rectangle that measures approximately 1/4 inch wide by 1 inch. Make as many copies of these

"teeth" as you want. Then, as shown in Figure 2, move and rotate the rectangles until they create a toothy grin. Once you have all the teeth in place, make the black outline invisible. Then select all of the objects on the page, and group them together.



You've just learned a great drawing technique. The white shapes act like an eraser. They hide parts of the black shape beneath. In fact, whenever you place a white object on top of a colored object you are

really creating a cut-out shape. Your printer always assumes that white areas should be the color of the paper, so for white objects it prints nothing.

Fig.3

Now that you've got the basic drawing technique under your belt, you can easily add eyes and a nose. The triangle nose measures roughly 5% inches wide by 3 inches. And the two black triangles for the eyes are each 3% inches wide by 2%-inches deep. Figure 3 shows you how we created a cartoon pupil for each eye by layering a white circle (approximately 1 inch wide) on top of the triangle.

When you're finished, the page drawing should look like Figure 4.



Rotate the eyes by 45 degrees, as shown in Figure 5. This makes it easier to cut the shapes apart, and leaves a ¼-inch safety margin around each shape.

Now it's time for a trial run. Print a proof of the pumpkin face on ordinary paper. Then cut out the shapes and place them on the shirt to see how they look. It's helpful if your child wears the shirt while you tape the shapes onto the shirt. Leave the shapes taped onto the shirt when your child takes it off.





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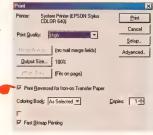
I Spy Spooky Mansion

I spy a surprise! Kids explore a mysterious house while solving challenging riddles, puzzles, and multi-leveled games. As they play, they collect clues to find a way out. It's scary how much fun learning can be! Ages 6-10.

Find I Spy CD-ROMs at your favorite software retailer.

You're ready for the final printout on T-shirt transfer paper. If your graphics program supports reversed printing, use it.

Reverse printing creates a mirror image of the graph that guarantees your



pumpkin face will look right once it has been ironed onto the shirt. American Greetings Crafts Deluxe contains an option in the Print dialog box that creates a mirror image for T-shirts automatically. But your graphics program may require an extra step to flip the drawing.

Allow the transfer print to dry thoroughly. Then carefully cut the shapes apart leaving a ¼ inch of material around each shape. Starting with the left eye, remove the plain paper cut-out that you taped to the shirt during the trial run, and put the transfer paper cut-out—ink side down—in its place. Using a hot iron, transfer the design to the shirt. Then repeat the process for the right eye, the nose, and the mouth—in that order. We recommend that you carefully read and follow the instructions provided by the manufacturer of the shirt transfer paper you are using. Heating times differ from brand to brand, and sometimes for small vs. large transfers.

After your child has put on the T-shirt, plump it up with batting, and secure it with a sash. To complete the ensemble, add a pair of black or green tights, or a green beret with a bit of raffia ribbon attached, and your child is ready to go trick-or-treating.

Different Shapes, Different Faces

Cartoonists have a few basic drawing rules that they use to convey emotion. To make a face look mean and angry, they draw the eyebrows slanted down toward the bridge of the nose and turn down the corners of the mouth. To make a face look happy, they start with a smile and then add high, arching eyebrows.

Using these same techniques, we created two very differ-



by we created two very different pumpkin faces. You can duplicate these designs by overlapping simple geometric shapes. Or you can download all of the designs we created for this story (in TIFF format) from the FamilyPC Web site

(www.familypc.com).



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CyberCops:

Learning a New Beat

The ratio today is one law enforcement official to about 7,000 crimes on the Internet. What's a cop to do?

ocal police aren't patrolling the cyberstreets yet, but they are learning about the Net and some of the threats it can bring to families.

In movies and on TV shows, we usually see cops typing at manual typewriters, using the two-fingered, hunt-and-peck approach. But with the Internet now implicated in crimes ranging from stalking to child pornography, bomb-making to hate crimes, fraud to solicitation, local police now must learn their way around computer keyboards and the Internet. It's not going to happen overnight, but it is happening.

Sure, the FBI and other federal agencies have been setting up high-tech crime units. But what about the average beat cop in your town—the one who concerned parents are likely to call first?

Today if you call the local police about an Internet incident, you can't be sure the person at the other end of the line will know what you're talking about when you tell them about a hate site on the Web, or a Web stalker, or an e-mail harasser who's been bothering your daughter. "We're behind the curve," says Lou Pacheco, deputy chief of police in Raynham, Mass., and one of a growing number who are trying to get ahead of that curve. "But we should be your first call. If we don't know what to do, we'll know who needs to be contacted."

Training the Cops

In most states, computer training is left to each department and usually starts with an individual officer. Pacheco's interest in being online began in 1983, when he bought the department a TRS-80 and a CompuServe subscription with money recovered in a hashish raid. He does his best to teach himself and his fellow officers how

to use the Internet in their day-to-day police work—forensics, investigations, informationgathering.

Many local police departments are trained by special units of the state police, such as New Jersey's High Technology Crimes and Investigations Support Unit, says New Jersey Detective Sergeant Dan Hurley. Others get help from the FBI, especially its Innocent Images Initiative, which originated in Baltimore and is now active in training local departments all over the country. Monica M. Patton, an FBI special agent and public affairs coordinator based in Newark, N.J., says, "The demand is huge and we're trying to accommodate all of those who want training."

For local departments that have the money, Henry Quinlan, publisher of Law Enforcement Internet Intelligence Report, offers one-day seminars on using the Web, for \$185 a head. His firm has run seminars in New York, Washington, Chicago, and other cities, with a standing-roomonly average of 150 police officers each time. The featured speaker at a recent seminar in Boston was Steve Davis, of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Dept. in Littleton, Colo.

Like much of the current training for local police, the seminars focus on the Internet more as an investigative tool than as a place where crimes take place. Even so, one very useful skill taught at Quinlan's seminars is how to track down people who are sending inappropriate or illegal e-mails. He says, "One big problem is harassment of kids and of ex-spouses via e-mail. A year or two ago, local police often would refer that to a federal agency. Now many local police departments are aware of how to deal with it."



Make the Call

Pacheco says parents dealing with Net crimes should start by calling their local police. "Victims are always local," he says. Even if the request for help doesn't stop there, it's the best place for you to start since an increasing number of local cops are gaining experience in Internet crime and investigations.

Eric Lundberg, for example, is a police detective in Easton, Mass., where he and Chief Stanley Bates have been busy setting up a multi-jurisdictional hightech task force that will help local police. Lundberg is assigned to the High-Tech Crime Unit of the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office, but works to bring his knowledge to the local level.

In a recent sting Lundberg set up online in an IRC chat channel, a 30-year-old man wound up soliciting a local police investigator posing as a 14-year-old girl. After sending child porn pictures to the investigator (which is illegal), the suspect set up a meeting in a local mall, believing he'd be meeting a 14-year-old girl at a designated time. Investigators knew the car he was driving and what he looked like. They watched him wait 45 minutes for the girl, then give up and head back to his car. Once he opened the car door, seven state troopers and two local police officers grabbed him.

"Inside the car was a bag from Frederick's of Hollywood," Lundberg said. "Inside the bag were two items that clearly would fit a 14-year-old. How many times does this happen without anyone knowing about it?"

To further the cause, Lundberg and his brother, Thor, have set up cyber snitch.net, a Web site where parents and kids can report online crimes—it's similar to and works with the CyberTipLine from the Center for Missing and Exploited Children at www.cybertipline.org. The site carries forms to report violations ranging from child pornography to

online stalking, Complaints to the proper authorities are forwarded. Recently, the site added a password-protected School Violence Watch section where law enforcement and school officials can exchange information on threats to school systems.

The Net's a New Beat

While showing his son the ropes on ABC-TV's NYPD Blue, detective Sipowitz says to Andy, Jr., "People, the places they go, the things they do, and the times they do them—a good beat cop always knows these things." You can be sure that as the Internet continues to impact their communities and the families that live on their real-life beats, local cops will increasingly come to know the Internet, the people on it, the Net places they go, the things they do, and the times they do them.

Joe Panepinto is a contributing editor to FamilyPC. E-mail him at joep111@go.com.



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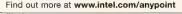
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Prix Fixe or A La Carte?

ichael Dillon admits he knew next to nothing about computers. So when he decided to buy one, finally, he did what a lot of newbies do. He pulled all the advertising circulars from electronics retailers out of his fat Sunday newspaper, laid them side by side, and compared the merchandise.

What all the ads had in common, he found, was that they featured some kind of bundled special—PC plus monitor plus printer. And the "computer package" or "complete system" offered considerable savings over the cost of the same items priced a la carte—\$150, \$200, as much as \$250, according to ads. To Dillon, buying a bundle made sense. So he did. The package he purchased from CompUSA bundled a Compaq PC with a 15-inch Compaq monitor and a Compaq inkjet printer.

"It eliminated having to walk around and find out what goes together," says Dillon, a customer service representative for US Airways who lives in Chicopee, Mass.

In Search of Savings

There are a lot of good reasons to buy a packaged system, and convenience is certainly at the top of the list. But you'll find that the bulk of the savings on any conveniently bundled system usually comes from manufacturer's rebates. On his purchase Dillon saved only \$25 at the cash register through CompUSA "instant savings." To collect a \$125 rebate from Compaq, he had to mail in forms and UPC codes and wait 8 to 10 weeks for a check.

And here's a little secret that retailers don't advertise in their circulars: You are not bound to buy the exact models shown in the packaged systems. You can make substitutions. Because he designs his own Christmas cards, Dillon wanted a higher-quality printer. So he upgraded his "system" to include a Compaq IJ900 color printer instead of the advertised Compaq IJ200. He paid an extra \$100, but he still qualified for the \$25 CompUSA instant savings and the \$125

Compaq rebate. Other stores, including Circuit City, will do the same.

"As long as you buy a complete system, you still qualify for the same price breaks," says Matt Strycharz, a Circuit City sales counselor. Rebate programs from companies like Compaq and Hewlett-Packard are so comprehensive, in fact, that they pretty much allow you to put together any PC, monitor, and printer they make.

Last summer, each company offered a very flexible rebate program on bundled hardware. For example, buying any HP Pavilion PC and HP monitor together saved you \$100. You saved an extra \$50 if you also bought one HP peripheral—a printer, scanner, or CD writer. You could save a total of \$200 if you added a second HP peripheral to your package.

Printer manufacturers have their own rebate programs, too, which often provide more money back if you buy a PC and a monitor at the same time. They usually don't care what brand.

Canon, for example, ran a program last summer offering \$20 and \$30 rebates, respectively, on its BJC-2000 and BJC-1000 inkjet printers. But if you bought a complete system, the rebates jumped to \$50. Similarly, HP was offering \$50 rebates on its printers when purchased with any non-HP PC and non-HP mon-

Don't be afraid to mix and match either. The HP Pavilion M50, a Buying a
special
bundled PC
package may
seem like a
deal, but keep
your eyes
open.



Savvy Consumer

15-inch monitor that came advertised with several complete systems last summer sold, by itself, for \$299 at CompUSA. A higher-resolution 15-inch Sony Trinitron monitor sold for \$199. Theoretically, you could buy any HP Pavilion PC, with the Sony monitor, and a Canon Printer, and still save the same \$150 as if you bought all the pieces from HP.

Benefits for Brand Loyalty

Buying all your hardware from a single manufacturer does have advantages. One is aesthetics. The style of your hardware will match, if that's important to you. "I think a lot of people concern themselves with how it looks in the home," says Ray Aldrich, a Hewlett-Packard spokesman.

Another advantage is technical support. "There's only one number to call," Aldrich says. "It's easy to finger-point the problem in the system."

Yet a third plus, as Michael Dillon says, is it takes out the guesswork. "One of the advantages of pre-configured systems is that the retailer makes decisions," says Ron Perry, associate professor of information technology at Rochester Institute of Technology.

Build Your Own

Consumers who've got their eyes on a bundle would be wise, though, to compare the prices against the same systems sold through the Build Your Own computer kiosks which are now available in many retail stores. Hewlett-Packard, Compag, NEC, and IBM all participate to some extent in this program, which allows consumers to configure namebrand systems to meet their specifications, A complete Compag system (PIII, 450MHz, 15-inch monitor, IJ200 printer) on sale at CompUSA was advertised for \$1,849.91, "after savings and rebates." The same computer configured through the kiosk, with a slightly bigger hard drive, could be purchased for \$1,828.89, including the printer and \$45 shipping charges. But the rebates still apply to computers purchased through the kiosks, so the total cost would have been only \$1,703.89.

The downside is that delivery takes about four weeks, and you have to pick it up at the store. Getting your rebate takes time and effort, and the company that offers a rebate is banking that a lot of customers won't follow through. Don't let one of them be you. Make copies of all your documents before you mail them off. If you don't get your rebate by the promised time period, be a nag. Write letters. make phone calls. send e-mail.

And don't think for one second that if you buy a "complete package," that you're actually getting a *complete* package. What's often not included? A printer cable (\$20), ink cartridges for your printer (\$25-\$35 each), a surge protector (\$30-\$70), floppy diskettes, and software. Those extras can add up.

Chris Yurko is a contributing editor for FamilyPC. E-mail him at Chris Y5203@aol.com.

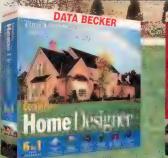


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Violent computer and video games have become a cultural obsession. Here's what parents need to know to protect their kids.

By Carolyn Jabs id a violent computer game called Doom play a role in the shooting rampage at Columbine High School earlier this year? We'll probably never know. But since the tragedy, parents have been taking a harder look at the violence that permeates the computer and video games that millions of kids love.

Some experts contend that playing games like Doom conditions children to accept and even participate in violence. Others argue that violent play has always been part of the socialization of young men in many cultures. (Although some girls play violent games, it's a predominantly male pastime.) And the kids who play violent games say it's about competition, not violence. "You want to be the best so you shoot as many opponents as possible but you don't think of it as killing a person," says Scott "DieHard" Waananen, a 19-year-old in Marquette, Mich., who has been a dedicated gamer since he was a sophomore in high school.

The debate about violent games has become so polarized that it's difficult for parents to find sensible, workable advice. And what expert guidelines we do get seem to be about generic kids, as though what makes sense for an 8-year-old should also apply to his 15-year-old brother. It's no wonder some parents react to violent games with a "not in my house" policy, and others adopt a "what can I do?" shrug.

Neither approach is helpful. It's impossible to insulate kids from popular culture, yet parents who ignore the issue leave children without the moral equipment they need to keep the violence in games from infecting their

Photography by Karen Kuehn



Child'sPlay?

thinking and behavior. Parents need to acknowledge the fascination these games have for kids, and develop family guidelines that reflect their values.

The reason to develop guidelines is not because violent games may turn your child into the next high-school hit man. As horrifying as such events may be, they are very much the exception, and social scientists agree it's almost impossible to ascribe a single cause to any given incident (see "Signs of Trouble" on page 63). Parents must come to terms with violent games because we want to nurture what's best in our children and assure their emotional health, despite a culture that is increasingly preoccupied with violent images.

Here are steps you can take today.

Be informed
Most kids know a lot more about the content of computer and video games than their parents do-and that puts adults at a disadvantage. Parents who wouldn't fall for the "but Johnny's parents let him" argument in other areas give in on games, because they don't know enough to set convincing limits. According to a recent FamilyPC online poll of 732 families, conducted by Digital Research, an independent research firm, 31 percent of the parents who responded don't preview the games their children want to play. (For the complete results of our survey on family gaming, see the annual GameGuide in the November issue of FamilyPC.)

To get up to speed, read reviews of the games your child wants to play (see "The Worst Games" on page 64). If your son is old enough, ask him to do some of the legwork and gather reviews you can read and discuss together. (Be aware that some materials, especially advertisements in gaming magazines, are unsuitable for pre-teens.) To learn about the plot, sex, violence, and language in popular games, check out FamilyPC's GameGuard (www.familypc.com). You can also visit gaming Web sites, such as GameSpot (www.gamespot.com), run

by Ziff-Davis, publisher of FamilyPC. The reviews will help you understand the appeal of some games, but they won't alert you to potentially offensive content. In many cases, you can download demos of games. If you're still in doubt, rent the game and play it with your child or hang out nearby while he plays.

Use the rating system
Often, violent and non-violent games

are lumped together on shelves in stores and rental outlets. This disarms many parents who think, "How bad could it be?" The answer is, "really bad." Some games are so clearly suited for adults only that they should be kept under the counter in brown-paper wrappers (see "Get Active!" on page 66).

To identify violent games, check each software box for a rating from the Entertainment Software Rating Board (www.esrb.org); the ESRB also rates online games. "The purpose of the ratings isn't to censor or dictate taste," says Arthur Pober, executive director of the ESRB, "We want to provide objective, clear information so people can decide what games they want in their homes,"

The ESRB depends on independent testers who use specific criteria to flag material that might be problematic for the general public. Ratings consist of two parts: an indicator of age appropriateness; and content descriptors, which let parents know exactly what their child will encounter in the game.

Parents who make and enforce consistent rules about ratings have the ultimate weapon against "pester power." You can simply say, "Check the rating." If it turns out to be too high, you can even be sympathetic: "That's too bad, I know you wanted to play that game. I wish the company hadn't made it so violent."

Make strict rules for children under 10 Psychologists still debate the effect of vi-

olence on mature players, but they're nearly unanimous in their conclusion that young children can be damaged by exposure to violent media. "Actions we observe and learn at a young age create



a baseline on which we take all future actions," says Leonard Eron, Ph.D., a psychologist at the University of Michigan who has spent his career studying the effects of violent television. "Whatever we put into a child has enormous consequences."

Brain research has demonstrated that before puberty, key neural pathways are developing in children. For compassion and empathy to blossom in kids, violence must be associated with distress. "In healthy play, the action stops as soon as someone gets hurt," says Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, the author of On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society (Little, Brown and Co.). But in computer and video games, violence has no consequences and is even associated with laughter and fun, "Interactive games are always teaching," says Grossman, a fact that software manufacturers promote enthusiastically until it comes to violence. "Parents constantly have to ask, what is my child learning from this game?"

Young children can't buy or rent games for themselves, so parents are the gatekeepers, says Daphne White, executive director of The Lion & Lamb Project (www.lionlamb.org), an organization that encourages parents to stand up against the violence permeating children's entertainment. She recommends parents be as firm about games rated "teen," "mature," and "adult" as they would be about cigarettes, liquor, or R-rated movies: "These are things adults may choose to use, but they are not for children and you can't play them." Period.

When you say "no" to a violent video or computer game, say "yes" to one that meets your guidelines. "Most games aren't violent," says David Walsh, Ph.D., president of the National Institute on Media and the Family (www.media andthefamily.org), an organization that rates video and computer games, and provides information about current research. KidScore, the Institute's annual report card, gives family-friendly ratings to 80 percent of the games it evaluates.

Think about what makes violence offensive

Most American adults don't have consistent values about violence. We claim to be against it, but we take our kids to see *Star Wars* and root for athletes who play aggressively. "We make a choice in our society that some things are not for children," says Jeanne Funk, Ph.D., a researcher at the University of Toledo who has studied the effects of violent games. "We have clear rules about guns, driving, alcohol, and pornography. We haven't really made that choice about violence."

Rules about damaging violence are difficult to formulate, because violence is an inevitable part of life. Nearly every compelling story, from the *Three Little Pigs* to *Hamlet*, involves conflict, which opens the door to violence. That's why simplistic rules—no violence—don't

y s of ales and ande work very well. "Children pick

up on hypocrisy," says the ESRB's Pober. And they argue more fiercely when they sense parental ambivalence.

It isn't easy, but we need to think about why some things offend us and other things are acceptable or even en-

Signs of Trouble

ost adolescents who are in good mental health don't face a huge hazard if they play a violent computer or video game occasionally. But parents should pay attention to the following signs, which may indicate that these games have taken on an unhealthy importance in a child's life.

Changes in behavior. For some kids, playing violent games seems to trigger more aggressive interaction with other people. Does your child have a tantrum when you suggest he do something else? Does he seem more likely to tease or hit siblings after a round of game-playing? Does he imitate the language or behavior he's seen in the game? Tie the privilege of playing games to peaceable, cooperative behavior.

Fluctuations in moods. Some children seem to get revved up by playing action games; others "zone out" and become lethargic. Do some games frustrate your child or make him hyper? Does he play when he's depressed, lonely, or bored? Don't be afraid to pull the plug on games that seem to be having an adverse effect on your child's emotions.

Obsessive game-playing. Some teens go through a period of intense involvement with a new game and then resume normal activities. Others need help from parents to maintain balance in their lives. The kids most likely to develop an unhealthy preoccupation with violent games are those who feel excluded by their peers and disconnected from their parents. Be sure game-playing doesn't nudge out time spent with family and friends, as well as doing chores, schoolwork, and extra-curricular activities.

For young people who are disturbed, the violence in computer and video games may aggravate and deepen their problems. Experts argue about how to recognize troubled teens without labeling kids who are simply individual or independent. A checklist developed by the National School Safety Center (www.nssc1.org) is a beginning. Although the list, which is posted on the site, doesn't mention playing violent games, it does include consistent preference for violent media. If your teen exhibits several of these symptoms, limit access to violent games and consider professional counseling.

—C.J.

Child's Play

tertaining. Do you believe cartoon violence is harmless fun but realistic images are desensitizing? Will you tolerate car crashes but not weapons? Is it OK to shoot bad guys, but unacceptable to kill innocent bystanders? And once your child can distinguish between fantasy and reality, do violent games become less harmful?

In many families, fathers and mothers have different opinions. (Many game manufacturers find that most of the complaints they receive about violent content come from moms.) Men may be more tolerant of violence because of how they were socialized, "There's always been an aggressive element in boy culture that involves daring, risk-taking, and challenging adult authority," says Henry Jenkins, professor of comparative media studies at MIT and co-author of From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender

and Computer Games (MIT Press). He argues that video games simply allow parents-especially mothers-to see violent fantasies that would once have been enacted on a vacant lot, "Children have frustration, aggression, sexuality," says Jenkins. "Parents always want to claim that this stuff comes from outside influences, but it doesn't"

Before parents can develop consistent guidelines for their children, they have to listen to each other and agree, perhaps, that they will veto any game either one finds genuinely disturbing. "Don't go on a witch hunt," says KidScore's Walsh. "Parents who try to get rid of everything with any violence may create a 'banned in Boston' effect, which makes the games even more desirable." Parents who can articulate specific objections-"That game is unacceptable because..."-will gain credibility with their kids and shape their ideas about what is truly violent and why it's unacceptable.

Tell older kids

what you think
Parents need to take a different approach with teenagers than they do with younger children. Even if you've set limits at home, your child will have access to games you find objectionable at arcades and his friends' houses. That's why it's important to help your teen develop inner resources that will guide him in making good decisions about how he wants to spend his time-and what kind of person he wants to be.

The only way to do that is to talka lot-about violent games. Ironically, the best way to keep the conversation alive may be to relax the strict rules that made sense when your child was younger. "Simply saying 'no' to older kids

"Violence has always been central to computer and video games," says Brent de Waal, an avid gamer who researched kids and video gameplay at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia, "That's probably because shooting and blowing things up is the quickest way to get a player's undivided attention-if you don't kill it, it kills you."

Several factors make the current crop of violent games more damaging. One is the first-person shooter point of view; games in which a player looks over the barrel of a weapon create an intense you-are-there experience. The games also have an astonishing, stomach-churning realism, which lets you see and hear the simulated agony of victims on screen. Finally, there's a loss of moral context. Some games no longer even make a pretense of good guys vs. bad guys-it's just shoot anything that moves.

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, the author of On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society (Little, Brown, and Co.), says these features erode the innate human reluctance to hurt another person. He points out that the military had trouble getting soldiers to fire their weapons in combat—until they started to use training devices that resemble video games. "Data on the effectiveness of simulators is overwhelming," says Grossman. "And we're letting kids use murder simulators."

Here's a short list of games many adults find disturbing:

Carmageddon Diablo Doom

Duke Nukem 3D Half-Life Kingpin

Postal Ouake Resident Evil





KINGPIN



CARMAGEDDON



RESIDENT EVIL



Child's Play?

can set up a war," says Diane E. Levin, the author of Remote Control Childhood? Combating the Hazards of Media Culture (National Association for the Education of Young Children). "Worse, it cuts you off from being able to influence the lessons your child learns." If your son plays Kingpin without your knowledge, you'll never get to talk about why it bothers you to see guts splatter across the screen.

Some parents know perfectly well what's going on in the next room but don't want to say anything because adolescents are argumentative, rude, and "won't listen anyway." Perhaps, but that doesn't exempt parents from the responsibility of expressing what they feel—whether that's anxiety, distress, shock, or outrage. "When my kids were in their teens. I often delivered 60-sec-

faces in trying to cope with the culture of computer and video games. Encourage him to show you the games he really likes and listen to what he says about them.

Some teens feel that playing violent games is mandatory for membership in adolescent peer groups. "I never met a male teenager who didn't like violent games," says a 17-year-old from Springfield, Ohio, "and I'd wonder about one if I did."

Other kids argue that playing violent games is relaxing, because they require such total concentration that they take your mind off other problems or worries.

> "When I get a good game online, I tune out all outside distractions," says Scott Waananen. He also points out that what happens on the screen is utterly different from real life. "Blowing up bits of computer code is like making a tackle in football. It's not at all like the real violence you see on the nightly news."

In fact, many of the games are so "over the top" that

teens recognize they're meant to poke fun at adult values. "Some gamemakers are clearly thinking 'What's the most unacceptable thing we can do?" says MIT's Jenkins. "They cross boundaries and exaggerate to the point of craziness."

As you talk to your son about what games mean to him, ask questions that stretch his thinking: Would this game be equally exciting if the violence weren't so realistic? Are you drawn to this game by the story, the strategy, the realism? Is the game better when it's played alone or with other people? Was it worth the money you spent on it? Does it live up to

the advertisements? How could this game be better? How do you feel when you finish playing it? When you're a parent, will you play a game like this with your child?

If you do this right, you'll create what Diane Levin calls a "compartment in your child's head" where he can think critically about violent games and skeptically about the marketing that makes them attractive. "The key is to adopt a tone that's not accusatory," says Levin.

Your objective, after all, isn't to nail your son for being swept up by the tidal wave of popular culture. "You want to engage him in a meaningful discussion about the world in which you both live," says Jenkins.

At the very least, such discussions will improve your relationship with your child. And that, experts say, may be the single most important thing you can do to inoculate your teen against the risks involved in playing violent games. "In the end," says Jeanne Funk, "media of all kinds should be a small part of a child's life. Family should be a huge part."

Carolyn Jabs is a FamilyPC contributing editor. She lives in Ohio with her husband, two sons, and daughter. Since researching this story, Jabs has set stricter rules for her 6-year-old son and is talking more to her 15-year-old and his friends about why they like to play violent games. Send e-mail to crjabs@aol.com to comment on this story.

Get Active

Violent computer and video games are not only readily available, they're being marketed to kids. Here are four steps you can take to change the cultural climate surrounding your children:

- Support arcades that ban violent games.
- Ask local store managers about their policies on selling and renting mature games to minors. Suggest the games be placed in an adults-only section and that identification be required.
- ➤ Write to toy manufacturers protesting the production of action figures based on games with mature content, Duke Nukem should not be a toy!
- ➤ Write to game manufacturers asking that they produce samplers that would allow parents to preview the game at all levels—some games start off benign and get more violent—before they purchase a game.

ond sermons," says Walsh. "I'd tell them they didn't have to agree, they just had to listen. And then I'd sum up what I thought." Recent studies suggest kids are starved for this kind of parental guidance, because they genuinely want adult help in sorting out their own values.

Listen to your teenager When you express your feelings about

When you express your feelings about violent games, your child isn't likely to nod and say, "Gee, I never thought of that way." You should expect disagreement and even value it as an opportunity to understand the challenges your child

His imagination has no limit.



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Stuff

on the Web

by Charles Pappas

$\mathsf{C}_{\mathrm{omics}}$

Comics.com (www.comics.com) If you buy the newspaper just for the comics, you can save your 25 cents. Everyone from Alley Oop to the Wizard of Id is at this site. You can get a month's worth of strips, although they're not always up-to-date.

Comic Explorer (www.comiczone.com/ex plorer) Part of Comics.com, this site lets you "click on things" and see "stuff happen." But you'll need a Java-enabled browser and a high-powered Windows PC—an Intel Pentium II processor running faster than 300MHz.

ComicsPage.com (www.comicspage.com) Point your browser here if the classics—Annie, Brenda Starr, Dick Tracy, and Gasoline Alley, for

instance—bring a smile to your face. The site also features editorial cartoons and bulletin boards where fans can discuss their favorites.

Creators.com (www.cre ators.com/comics/com ics.asp) Look here for oldtime funnies, such as B.C. and Heathcliff, plus many new stars, including Rugrats and Color Blind. You'll also find links to edi-

torial cartoons, as well as columns from Ann Landers and Tony Kornheiser, horoscopes by Joyce Jillson, and lots of popular (and, perhaps, not-sopopular) opinions.

Contests

Butterfinger Simpson's Weekly Trivia Quiz (www.butterfinger.com/trivia) Are the Simpsons your idea of an all-American family? Then try the sitcom-centered trivia questions at this Nestlesponsored site. Prizes include cases of Bart's favorite candy bar and copies of the Songs in the Key of Springfield music CD.

Fred's Trivia Corner (www.billboard-online.com/ trivia) If music is your muse, test your knowledge at Billboard's weekly contest site. Be among the first 20 who answer Fred's Friday contest question correctly—no small feat—to win a music CD from Rhino records. Publishers Clearing House (www.pch.com) You may already be a winner at this site; in addition to the usual contests, it offers daily and monthly giveaways. Prizes range from TVs to cruises, with (no surprise) plenty of magazine subscriptions thrown in. Some "free" gifts require a small shipping and handling charge.

TreeLoot (www.treeloot.com) Don't tell the kids, but sometimes money does grow on trees. Click on the correct leaf on this magic online shrub, and you could win thousands of dollars. The stash is replenished every day, and you can try as often as you like.

Uproar (www.uproar.com) You'll be in an uproar over this site, where you can win anything from meat to money by being the best at Trivia, Bingo, Guess-the-Celebrity, and other online games.



Coupons

CoolSavings.com (www.coolsavings.com) Enroll and you'll get coupons you can either print out or use when you shop online. Participating stores and restaurants may change, but at last look they included eToys, Kmart, and RadioShack.

Dine 4 Less (www.dine4less.com) This site serves up a menu of coupons for national restaurants, such as Domino's Pizza, Taco Bell, and Mrs. Fields Cookies, as well as any participating eateries in your area.

DirectCoupons (www.directcoupons.com) Subscribe to this service, and you'll receive a weekly e-mail full of redeemable coupons.

ValuPage (www.valupage.com) Print out a page of grocery coupons, buy at least one of the advertised items, and present the page at the supermar-

ket checkout. Then, the next time you shop, you'll get credit for the full amount of the coupons.

E-mail

Bigfoot (www.bigfoot.com) Tired of juggling several e-mail accounts? Bigfoot offers three free e-mail management services, including forwarding, distribution of mail for up to five accounts, and filtering.

MSN Hotmail (www.hotmail.com) Free e-mail doesn't get any easier than this: There's no software to download, and you can access your messages from any PC with a Web connection.

Liquid Information (www.liquidinformation.net)
Here you get free e-mail with autoforwarding and
autoreply, and free access to newsgroups. And
there's no limit on the number of e-mail messages
you can store or send.

Panda Mail (bstar.net/panda) This site lets you check on and write e-mail from an existing account when you're on the road. Note: It won't work if you're using an America Online or AT&T Worldnet account.

Entertainment

Free TV Tickets (www.tvtix.com) Want to attend a TV taping? Choose a show, date, and time from the list provided on this site, then click to order a ticket to attend a live taping of L.A.-based shows like Jeopardy, Wheel of Fortune, Dennis Miller Live, and more.

TicketMaster Online (www.ticketmaster.com) You can go to the front of the line here—search for an upcoming event by state, name, type (museums, theatre, opera, ballet, rock, jazz, circus, baseball, and so on), even city and date.

Finance

Debt Analyzer (www.debtanalyzer.com) Get a leg up in pulling yourself out of debt. You can download a free evaluation copy of the \$25 program, or you can opt for the "lite" edition, Debt Relief, which is available in both free (ad-supported) and \$10 (no advertising) versions.

Free RealTime.com (www.freerealtime.com) This site delivers unlimited real-time stock quotes, plus

a wealth of information from various industry sources and tips from market professionals.

MarketPlayer.com (www.marketplayer.com)
Stock traders who have a healthy understanding
of stock-market terminology and investment theories can participate in one of the site's online
competitions for cash orizes.

Smartstocks.com (www.smartstocks.com) If you're just getting started in investing, the Beginners area of this site provides a lengthy list of links to various information sources. Once you're ready to dabble, try the site's Stock Game, a stock-investing simulator that bankrolls you with \$1 million in virtual funds. If your results in the Stock Game top all others for the month, you win \$100.

Freeware

Moochers (www.moochers.com) No one likes a moocher, but you'll love Moochers. Its archive of Windows 95/98/NT freeware games, graphics, fonts, and utilities will keep the hungriest computer fan happy. New goodies are added daily.

MrRat.com (www.mrrat.com) If you have enough games to fill a virtual toy chest but you're short in other areas, check out this site for utilitarian Windows freeware, including browsers, chat programs, graphics, and fax software.

Games

duJour.com (www.dujour.com) Love puzzles? This site's chock full of them, including MondoTrivia, Riddle duJour, The Labyrinth, and other mindtwisters. Solve 'em and you might win a prize.

Excite Classic Games (www.excite.com/ games/online_games) If you enjoy classics like backgammon, chess, and bingo, this site will put you in touch with hundreds of other fun-loving fans. You'll also find online foes for many other kinds of games, plus chat rooms and tips for honing your skills.

Jeopardy Online (www.station.sony.com/ jeopardy) Can't get enough of the popular game show on TV? Match wits with challengers from around the globe, and keep your eye out for a chance to win prizes in tournament play. If you're not quite ready for prime time, click on the Single Player option.

iPong Game Arcade (www.ipong.com) Remember when this video version of table tennis was all the rage? Re-live those days of innocence here, or

try your hand at Power iPong, a 3D version, or iPong Trivia. Instant Winner promotions promise small bucks. fast.

Stan's NetChess (www.stansco.com/netchess) Don't have time to play an entire match? This site lets you enter one or a few moves a day against opponents with similar time constraints.

Yahoo! Games (games,yahoo.com) This site offers a bevy of free games that challenge the intellect: board games (backgammon, checkers, chess, go, and reversi), card games (bridge, cribbage, gin, hearts, and more), and fantasy games (baseball, golf, and soccer).

You Don't Know Jack—the netshow (www.won.net/gamerooms/bezerk) Know-it-alls can download the software to play this free online version of the pop-culture quiz show that's a perennial favorite on CD-ROM. In minutes you'll be proving it's still hip to be square.

Genealogy

Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com) You can use this site to search the Social Security Death Index, the Ancestry World Tree, and many more databases. You can even set up your own Web site for other family members to visit.

Family Search (www.familysearch.org) At this site, created by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, you can sift through 35 million names in the Ancestral File and 360 million names in the International Genealogical Index.



Giveaways

Aleve (www.aleve.com/html/sample. htm) If you don't mind filling out a form and answering a few questions, you can get a free sample of this popular pain reliever.

Anna Cris Maternity (www.annacris.com) This designer of contemporary maternity clothes offers expectant mothers a free subscription to BabyTalk magazine.

Excedrin Headache Resource Center (excednn.com/0-3 enroll.html) Got a headache from filling out forms? Answer a few more questions to receive product samples and headache management materials.

Olan Mills (www.olanmills.com/special/com pare.asp) Enter your name and address, and you'll get a gift certificate for a free 8x10 photo at the studio nearest you.

Petstore.com (www.petstore.com) Sign up for the free PetStories e-mail newsletter, and you'll receive a gift—a personalized tag for your dog or cat.

Seattle FilmWorks (affiliateppc.freeshop.com/ pg00049.htm) For the cost of filling out a form, this company will send you two free rolls of 35mm film.

Graphics

ArtToday (www.arttoday.com) Your free membership delivers access to 40,000 animations, images, backgrounds, buttons, icons, photos, fonts, and more.

Barry's Clip Art Server (www.barrysclipart.com)
This easy-to-navigate site offers hundreds of
pieces of clip art with wedding, holiday, nature,
and baseball themes.

FreeFoto.Com (www.freefoto.com) The name of this innovative site says it all—you'll find more than 4,000 free pieces of online stock photography for non-commercial use.

IconBAZAAR (www.iconbazaar.com) This kidfriendly site serves up more images than a camel has fleas, such as alphabets, animals, cartoons, and flaos.

Media Builder (www.mediabuilder.com) Saying this site offers free graphics is like saying the universe is kind of big. Pick from a library of more than 10,000 images or make your own 3D Text, animated banners, and buttons.

NetCREATORS Icon Page (www.animatedgifs. simplenet.com) If your clip art feels as boring as a blank page, liven things up with more than 400 animated graphics, clearly organized by category.

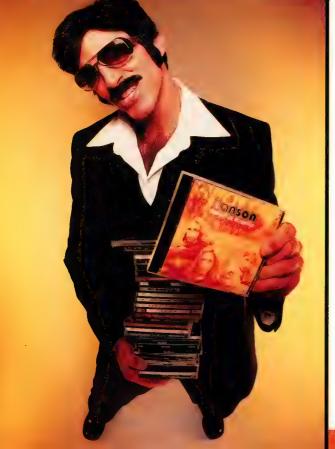
Greeting Cards

Animated CyberKisses (www.cyberkisses.com)
Choose an electronic card from one of several
categories—Get Well, Thank You, Secret Admirer,
and so on---type a message, and send it to a
friend or loved one. Each card can be sealed with
animated lip prints.

Blue Mountain Arts (www.bluemountain.com)
Say it with a song! This site offers scores of musical cards celebrating the usual lot of anniversary,
sympathy, get well, and graduation events—as
well as endangered species, dogs, computers, and
left-handed people. You can order your musical
missive up to two months in advance.

Regards.com (www.regards.com) Select a greeting card with images ranging from Van Gogh's Self Portrait and Edward Hopper's Nighthawks to graffiti art, sunsets, and teddy bears. Then add songs, colors, even famous quotes to the mix, and arrange to send them as much as six months ahead of time.

The Digital Postcard (www2.all-yours.net/ postcard/dp.html) Design your own online greeting card. You'll find a slew of images that can be customized for color, backgrounds, and music. You can





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check-up. Including your CD-ROM. speakers, sound card, video board, modem, even your mouse.

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"If you want the best defense against system problems. turn to the granddaddy of all utility packages, Norton Utilities.' Smart Computing, 3/98 could have wiped away a year's worth of work. It could have screwed up your data. It could have tucked its deadly digital infection deep inside your hard drive. It could have, and would have…but you had Norton AntiVirus.™

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assaults. It even updates itself without having to restart your system. With 100,000,000 computers on the Internet, it's a big, contagious, wired world out there. To keep your PC in the pink, fight infection with Norton protection.

Clean Up The Clutter On Wednesday.

Sure you bought the biggest, baddest hard drive in the store.

But that was before everyone you ever met e-mailed you.

Before whiz-bang plug-ins so you could visit one site...once.

Before MP3.

Before video grabs and digital photos.

Before the hottest Sim game needed 8 CDs. Isn't it time to throw open the window, and toss out all that clutter!?

Sweep away your unneeded files, unused programs, and unnecessary junk. With the #1 choice for hard drive clean up... Norton CleanSweep.™



Catch A Crash On Thursday.

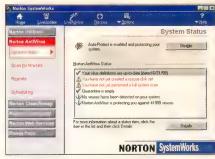
Tick...tick...tick...tick. Like some technological timebomb. all computers are doomed to blow up. Only you can't predict when yours will crash. Or why it will freeze. The only thing you know for sure is that it

happens to everyone.

And generally it happens when you can least afford it. Like when you haven't saved your work for over an hour. Or just after you've entered the last address in a 385-person mailing list. Or the final numbers into a tedious spreadsheet.

We think the best defense is a stronger offensive. That's why Norton CrashGuard™ jumps right into the path of an oncoming crash. It protects your work first, even creating a SafeOriginal," then guides you step-by-step through recovery.

Crashes happen. Just make sure you're not crushed by the next one.



Start any or all of Norton SystemWorks from one screen. No rebooting!



"Superb it informed us of problems we did not previously know about. InternetWeek, 3/99

Call For An Instant Update On Friday.

Has another week flown by already? In this high-tech world, a thousand things can change in only five days. There are new software updates, system patches, bug fixes, hardware drivers, and virus definitions. Luckily, you've got a six-month subscription to Norton Web Services[™] It's the most comprehensive PC resource center on the Internet.

Like a Yellow Pages for computer support, it's the one place to turn for all current system maintenance information and downloads.

Internet "operators" are even standing by. Our Norton support staff is there, online, to assist you in real time. And if

you'd like, we'll Norton even notify you Web about the latest ervices developments, by e-mail.

Take A Break On Saturday With Our Free Bonus Pack.

As if owning "the best utility suite" (Windows Magazine, 3/99) wasn't reward enough, we're sweetening the deal. We've added a special Bonus Pack that includes Zip-It!™ which shrinks any files you want to archive, or makes them faster to e-mail.

You'll get Norton 2000™ Bios Test & Fix. If you want to go to sleep this New Year's Eve without waking up to a nightmare on New Year's morning, check VOHT PC now!

You'll be able to send and receive faxes directly from your computer with your bonus copy of WinFax™ Basic Edition, There's also Symantec Visual Page[™] for building and managing your own personal Web page. Even encryption software to safeguard your private files from prying Internet eyes.

Is Sunday A Day Of Rest? ...Hardiv!

You can snooze as late as you want. because Norton SystemWorks is awake and alert to any potential PC problems.

Our award-winning programs are protecting your computer, automatically, 24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week.

So surf the Web. Play a game. Or, don't even touch your computer.

"Like a lifesaver bobbing on a turbulent sea, Norton SystemWorks will keep you afloat." (InternetWeek, 3/99)

"It's The Obvious Choice."

-PC Magazine

"Norton SystemWorks brings together several best-of-breed utilities for significantly less than you'd pay to get them separately. For

What's the secret of our success?...

Norton Symmetry!

In May, when PC Magazine bestowed it's prestigious

said, "...the real advantage lies in SystemWorks' Integration,"

given it a special name: Norton Symmetry. It's our exclusive

method to insure our programs

look, act, and work alike. Okay, that might sound

simplistic to you, but our competition is still paffled

now we accomplished it!

powerful software suite

In short, we've made a

We think our integration technology is so special, we've

Editors' Choice Award on Norton SystemWorks, they one-stop shopping for system utilities, it's the obvious choice."

"...does even more to help Windows users deal with the headaches of system crashes, missing or corrupted files, computer viruses, and other facts of Windows life."

-PC Week 4/99

-PC Magazine, 5/99

"...a seamlessly integrated suite of utility and antivirus software . . . an exceptional value."

-InternetWeek 3/99

"...other programs offer similar features but fall far short of what Norton has."

- Knight Ridder Newspapers 1/99









Put new Norton SystemWorks 2000 to work today.



To buy it online, or find your nearest Norton software dealer, please visit our website.

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even add pictures from other Web sites, or graphics and sounds from your own computer.

Xoom's Greeting Cards (greetings.xoom.com)
Do you like to celebrate such obscure "holidays"
as Hermit Week? This site has an e-card for every
occasion—from Love Gone Wrong to Let's Do
Coffee, Lunch, Drinks.

Home Improvement

Ask Earl, The Yard-Care Answer Guy (www. yardcare.com) If you're a little green when it comes to maintaining a healthy lawn, just type a term or a question, and Earl—a really a clever database—will search out information for you.



garden.com (www.garden.com) This site's Plant Finder takes the mystery out of gardening by matching the climate in your area and your soil with the kinds of flowers you want.

Golden Rule's Home Improvement Calculators (www.goldenrulehardware.com/applets.html) Quick: How many 9-inch square floor tiles will it take to cover a 120-square-foot room? How many cans of paint will you need to put a new coat on the family room? Just plug in the measurements at this site, and you'll get a free assessment of how much material you'll need for your next home improvement job.

Home Pages

GeoCities (www.geocities.com) Create your own home on the Web. When you sign up for a free basic membership, you get a site with 11MB of storage space, tools to build a home page, e-mail, and much more.

Homestead (www.homestead.com) This site offers easy-to-use authoring tools. You get 12MB of storage space for your finished product (plus another 1MB to accommodate others to whom you give page-editing rights). You can advertise it in up to three different categories in the Homestead Directory. As a bonus, the site description you write automatically becomes a meta tag, which allows numerous search engines to find your homestead.

Horoscopes

ChartShop (www.chartshop.com) Kelli Fox, an astrologer and publisher of Astrology.Net, offers a free sample report on your astrological chart.

Internet Horoscopes (www.internethoroscopes. com/astro.shtml) Looking for someone wise to read your future? Jade Wise, a practicing astrologer, will e-mail your horoscope daily "on the things that matter most: romance and sex, health and fitness, career and finance."

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Kids'

Cool Science for Curious Kids (www. hhmi.org/coolscience) Here students in grades K through 3 can explore biology with experiments on screen and off, adapted from museums across the

country. Our personal favorite: finding out what's hiding inside your nose (hey, this is serious stuff!).

Earth Dog (www.earthdog.com) The contest at this site, devoted to educating young people about environmental issues, is a purebred winner. If your child's report on the environment is selected, he or she gets cash, a T-shirt, and the story published online. If your youngster's entire class participates, the school could win a Sony WebTV.

Kids' Castle (www.kidscastle.si.edu) Hailing from the prestigious Smithsonian Magazine, the Castle offers lots of fun and challenging games and contests for children ages 8 to 16. Inquiring minds can also learn about sports, history, arts, travel, and science.

Kids in the Kitchen (www.kitchenlink.com/cgi/ public_frames?page=rcpkids) This site ladles out lots of ideas for food-related activities and crafts, as well as recipes that will delight youngsters who like to cook.

Ooo And Goo (members.tripod.com/Sterner/ooo andgoo.html) Ooey Goey Silly Putty, Cornstarch Goop, Stretchofoam, Flubber and Glop—all can be yours in a matter of minutes, thanks to the gross-out recipes on this site. (Parental supervision suggested.)

ToyLab (www.toylab.com) Imagine an arcade with all the fun but none of the hassles—or the costs. That's ToyLab, where kids can play G-rate games like Boot Rear Soda online: The goal is to help Jitter add fizz to his Boot Rear Soda by collecting boots for his homemade brew. Or, download the messy fun of Splatberry Pie.

Legal

LawGuru.com (www.lawguru.com) This site features bulletin boards of archived questions and answers, searchable by state, area of law, and keyword. If you don't find the information you need on the boards, you can submit a question. The attorneys who run LawGuru.com will review your question and either answer it themselves or forward it to other attorneys and post it on the BBS. You'll be notified by e-mail when an answer to your question has been posted.

FreeAdvice.com (www.freeadvice.com) On this site's docket you'll find a wealth of legal information, divided into categories, such as Accident Law, Family Law, and General Practice. It's all arranged in an easy-to-understand Q&A format. If you need more specific, one-on-one help, it's a snap to search for an appropriate attorney in your state.

Music

Imagine Radio (www.imagineradio.com) Have a secret yen to be a radio DJ? This site is the answer to your dreams. You can build your own Internet radio station and broadcast your own playlist.

RadioMoi (www.musicmusic.com/radio moi) This site also lets you create your own playlist from tens of thousands of song files in its library, but you have to download a special application.

Spinner (www.spinner.com) Just install the free Spinner player, log back on, and you can bop and jive to any of more than 175,000 songs on 120 channels of music programmed in formats from show tunes to hip-hop, Motown, and more.

Parenting

Crayola FamilyPlay (www.familyplay.com) "Mom, there's nothing to do!" Sound familiar? Then this site's list of age-appropriate activities, divided into categories ranging from art projects to car games, will be music to your ears.

fastWEB.com (www.fastweb.com)
Once you open a free account and create a personal profile, this service will scour more than 400,000 scholarships and awards to find the ones your college-bound child might qualify for.

ParenthoodWeb (www.parenthoodweb.com) Kids don't come with instruction booklets, but you can get plenty of operating tips here. A newsletter is bolstered by on-site information on everything from pregnancy to product recalls.

Personalized Pregnancy Newsletter (www. parentsplace.com) The best time to start being a good parent is before you become one. This free newsletter from iVillage's Parents Place.com can help. Customized according to your due date,



the newsletter guides you, week-by-week, through your baby's developments—and your own.

The Polly Klaas Foundation (www.pollyklaas.org /safetykit.htm) This site offers a free Child Safety Kit, which includes a number of valuable brochures explaining how to keep your children safe.

The Positive Parenting Newsletter (www.pos itiveparenting.com/news.html) It's hard to be a positive mom or dad when the little one's an angel for the sitter and a monster for you—but that's positively normal, say the folks at Positive Parenting. Their quarterly newsletter is packed with tips on raising healthy, well-adjusted kids.

Screen It! (www.screenit.com) It's tough to keep track of everything your kids see. But why buy quickly outdated movie guides when this online resource rates current hits at the box office and on video? The site evaluates films in 15 areas, such as alcohol/drugs, blood/gore, disrespectful/bad attitude, and violence. Music is also rated, though new releases are no longer being reviewed.

Recipes

BettyCrocker.com (www.bettycrocker.com)
Betty's weekly menu planner has pre-set meals for
every taste. You can mix and match your favorites,
then print out a shopping list and all the recipes to
get you started on the week.

CopyKat Creations (www.copykat.com) If dining out is your undoing, try cooking up your restaurant favorites at home. This site offers recipes for everything from Benihana's Ginger Dipping Sauce to McDonald's Secret Sauce.

digitalchef (www.digitalchef.com) Looking for something to spice up your night? Try Lighter Lasagne, Bacon and Cheddar Chicken Breasts, or a Pumpkin Loaf—just a sampling of the thou-

> sands of mouthwatering recipes in this searchable database.

SOAR (soar.Berkeley. EDU/recipes) The Searchable Online Archive of Recipes is bound to delight the adventurous or bored cook. It has more than 60,000 recipes in scores of categories from main dishes to

desserts, from various regions and ethnic groups, including Native American, Swedish, and Thai.

Rewards

Big Bang (www.bigbang.com) Rack up frequent flyer miles at Big Bang just by clicking on ads. It's like getting paid for surfing the Web!

Esearch (www.esearch.com) This site invites you to participate in surveys, many of which deal with

topics of substance, not only commercial products and services. As a reward, you're entered in a drawing for cash and other prizes.

FreeLotto (www.freelot to.com) After you register, you can play three times a day for a chance to win \$1 million. Pick your lucky six numbers or choose Quick Pick. Greenfield Online (www.greenfieldonline.com) If you're willing to participate in market research—online surveys and FocusChats—through this site, you can earn money and be eligible to win cash and non-cash prizes.

MyPoints (www.mypoints.com) Earn points by shopping online, filling out surveys, and simply visiting Web sites. Then, redeem your points for certificates usable at Barnes & Noble, Eddie Bauer, The Sharper Image, and many other participating merchants.

Shopping

Mind-it (mindit.netmind.com) This helpful site monitors shifts in the price of plane tickets, mortgage rates, stocks, compact discs, and more, then alerts you—by Web page, e-mail, pager, or PDA—to changes on sellers' Web sites.

mySimon (www.mysimon.com) If you can't afford a personal shopper, mySimon is the next best thing. It searches the offerings of online retailers to find the best prices, shipping costs, and even warranties.

Soho

CCH Business Owner's Toolkit (www.toolkit.cch.com) A must for any SOHO (small office/home office) entrepreneur, this site offers advice on starting, financing, and running a small business; model business plans and forms; counseling via e-mail from SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) volunteers, financial spreadsheet templates, and the "SOHO Guidebook."

FaxWave (www.faxwave.com) Imagine being able to receive faxes from just about anywhere. After you register, this innovative site gives you a personal telephone number. Faxes sent to that number are converted into a computer-readable format and attached to an e-mail message. Simply open the attachment to read your fax.



T_{alk}

AOL Instant Messenger (www.aol.com/aim/ home.html) You no longer have to be an AOL member to use this free instant messaging system. It lets you talk with anyone, anywhere, using any kind of browser and any Internet Service Provider—as long as they have Instant Messenger, too.

ICQ (www.icq.com) Similar to AOL Instant Messenger, this service enables instant messaging, plus you can send Web links, play games, and incorporate sound effects from *The Simpsons* and Star Wars.

PowWow (www.powwow.com) Up to nine people at once can chat with this free service by typing or sending voice messages. PowWow also lets you play games—backgammon, cards, checkers, chess, and dominoes—across the Internet.

TRAC (www.trac.org) Confused by all the long-distance offers? A service at The Telecommunications Research and Action Center Web site lets you compare seven long-distance companies' rates for interstate calls within specific calling plans.

Tech Support

McAfee Clinic (clinic.mcafee.com/clinic/default.asp)
Want to get your PC into tiptop shape and keep it
that way? Sign-up at this site and you get access
to online applications that will scan your system
for viruses, unneeded files, and more. Note:
McAfee Clinic is designed to work with Microsoft
Internet Explorer 4.x. To use it with earlier versions
of Explorer or Netscape Navigator, you must
download a plug-in called the McAfee Activator.

No Wonder! (www.nowonder.com) Frustrated at the computer? This site aims to ease your headaches with a full complement of tech-support volunteers who stand ready to handle your computing conundrums, usually within 24 hours. Don't forget to check out the message boards and live discussion area, where you might find the answers you need on the spot.

Tools

Anonymizer (www.anonymizer.com) If you don't like the idea that Web sites can gather information about you, protect your privacy. The Anonymizer lets you visit any site without leaving a trail. The service is free, but you'll encounter a brief delay before reaching your destination; the premium version (\$14.99 per quarter or \$49.99 per year) is quicker.

BobMarks: The Essential Web Site Library (www.twobobs.com) This time-saving site offers pre-organized links to a cornucopia of Web sites. The full version—more than 2,500 bookmarks in 270-plus categories—costs \$9.95, but you can try a "lite" version free of charge. You'll get more than 820 links in 10 categories, including Health, Job Resources, Parenting and Family, Real Estate, Reference and Homework, Shopping, Travel, and Women's Resources.

Net Vampire (www.netvampire.com) Tired of waiting for files to download? This nifty Windows 5/5/88/NT download manager lets you schedule downloads for any time of day or night. If the telephone connection breaks, it will reconnect and continue downloading. It even scans files for viruses, disconnects your modem, and shuts down your computer when the job's done.

Travel

Online CityGuide (www.onlinecityguide.com) What's doing in Dubuque? What's on in Orlando? With the Online CityGuide you won't have to guess. The site provides information on current events, shopping, dining, entertainment, and recreation for more than 1,700 cities.

SavvyDiner (www.savvydiner.com) You don't have to be rich to have a personal concierge. SavvyDiner gives you sample menus to top restaurants in more than 20 cities, and when you find one that whets your appetite, it will make a guaranteed reservation for you.

Charles Pappas is a freelance writer and compulsive bargain hunter who works from his home office in Huntsville, Alabama.



Internet brokerages have made investing in the stock market easy and affordable for millions of middle-class Americans.
Is that a good thing?

Online Trade-offs

BY ROBERT MARKS

WHEN I BEGAN PUTTING MY FINANCIAL HOUSE IN ORDER five years ago, I followed the advice of most personal finance experts and built a diversified portfolio of bond and stock mutual funds. As the market soared, several of my funds appreciated 20 percent a year or more. But during the same period, I watched the share prices of some companies double or triple, and I began to get itchy to invest directly in stocks.

About two years ago, I had some extra cash and decided to open an account with E*Trade (www.etrade.com), an online brokerage. I never considered a conventional broker, because the commissions were too high and the amount I was investing was too small for a broker to pay much attention to me. In February 1998, I invested \$3,000 in Apple Computer at \$18.25 per share. At the time, Apple was having financial problems, but I loved my Mac and figured the company would bounce back. It did. I sold my stock at \$37.50—doubling my money in just five months. I was sold on the benefits of online trading.

The Internet and online brokerages have given millions of middle-class Americans like me the opportunity to invest in the stock market in a convenient and affordable way. The Web has hundreds of sites that offer investment information, live stock quotes, and news, so small investors now have access to much of the research that only large institutions and wealthy Americans once enjoyed (see "Invest Some Time at These Sites" on page 84).

But there's another side to the story. Internet brokerages have been plagued by service problems, and they may not be giving customers the best price for their stocks. Experts also worry that the rising number of online investors has exacerbated market volatility and created the possibility that many people will get burned when the market inevitably tumbles.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PJ LOUGHRAN



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Online Trade-offs

The Upside

Five years ago, online trading didn't exist. Today, more than 100 online brokerages serve the 6.3 million U.S. households that have opened online accounts, according to NFO Worldwide, a research firm in Greenwich, Conn. And some analysts expect the number of online accounts to soar to 20.4 million within four years. "We'll look back in a few years and see that in the mid- to late-1990s, we experienced a revolution in how people invest," says Bradley Skolnik, securities commissioner for the state of Indiana and president-elect of the North American Securities Administrators Association.

The incredible growth of online trading is the result of several trends. There has been a sustained bull market. For the first time in history, the Standard & Poor's 500 stock index rose more than 20 percent for four years in a row, from 1995 to 1998. During the

More than 100 online brokerages serve the 6.3 million U.S. households that have online accounts.

same period, the number of American households plugged into the Internet skyrocketed, and people became more comfortable buying goods online.

Many investors have been losing faith in the \$5.5 trillion mutual fund industry. Last year, only 12 percent of all domestic equity funds beat the S&P's 500 stock index. Worse, in a year when the S&P 500 was possible percent, one-third of all domestic equity funds lost money, and some 250 funds lagged the S&P 500 by 30 percentage points or more.

Also, competition among the online trading firms has driven down commission rates. An online investor who buys 100 shares of stock at \$100 each pays, on average, a commission of just \$26. That's 44 percent less than the average of \$46 paid by customers of conventional discount brokers and 77 percent less that he average of \$111 paid by customers of full-service brokers, according to Weiss Ratings, which rates the safety and stability of financial institutions.

"You can now make a million dollar trade with a \$12 commission," says Lawrence E. Harris, the Fred V. Keenan Chair in Finance at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business. "That shows how much cheaper trading has become."

Many investors say they don't want to pay full-

service commissions, because the advice they get just isn't worth it. "You always have to wait to get a broker on the phone," says Jessica Ring, a 39-year-old homemaker in New Hyde Park, N. Y., who switched from a full-service broker to online trading in December 1998. "The advice was worthless. You're better off doing your own research and making your own decisions."

And trading online is convenient. "I can do it from wherever I am and at any time of day," says a 47-year-old owner of a wholesale medical supplies company on Long Island, N.Y., who requested that his name not be used. "I'm online all day at work. I flip back and forth from whatever I'm doing and check stock prices."

Bernard Derringer, a 71-year-old retired marketing executive who trades through The Vanguard Group's online service (www.vanguard.com), agrees. "It's very efficient," he says. "You log on, and it's all there for you. It's very easy to use. You don't have to have a long conversation with a broker. A few clicks and you're done."

Online trading also has brought some unfair practices to the attention of average investors. For instance, in the past only favorite clients of conventional brokers got access to shares available through initial public offerings. Now online brokerages can offer IPO shares to all of their clients. The medical supplies company owner, who trades through DLJdirect (www.dljdirect.com), was able to buy shares in MarketWatch.com when it went public in January. He bought them at the offer price of \$17 per share. "It shot up as high as \$130 on the first day," he says. "I got out at \$110."

The Downside

Online brokerages do have their drawbacks (see "Before You Trade Online..." on page 83). "It's easy to buy when you mean to sell," says the supplies company owner. "That's happened to me several times, because the 'buy' and 'sell' screens look the same. It worked out well twice and not so well once."

There have been reports of people who thought they canceled orders and, not realizing the first ones had been executed, placed them again. They wound up with twice as many shares as they wanted. In other cases, people put in orders to buy Internet stocks at the market price on the day of an IPO. But the stocks rose so fast, they paid four or five times more than they expected.

Another problem is that the Internet brokerages

haven't been able to keep up with their rapid growth. In the first three months of this year, the average number of trades processed daily by online brokerages jumped 49 percent over the previous quarter, according to the investment bank U.S. Bancorp Piper Jaffray. During the same period, Charles Schwab (www.schwab.com) had seven outages. Online investors couldn't access E*Trade's system for three consecutive days during one week in February. And Waterhouse Securities' (www.waterhouse.com) Web trading went down for brief periods two consecutive days in January.

Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) has proposed a bill that would require online brokerages to disclose transaction delays each quarter on their Web site and report them to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. The outages are a concern mainly to active traders, according to Dan Burke, senior brokerage analyst at Gomez Advisors, a Concord, Mass., research firm. "You can't afford down time if you need to get

in and out of a stock," he says. "There aren't many outages at one firm over the course of a year. They tend to come in fits if there's a bug."

But poor service is an issue even for investors who trade only a few times a year. Web sites get overloaded on busy trading days, and investors have been unable to access their accounts. Although most online brokerages let you execute a trade through an automated telephone system, these systems also get overwhelmed, and customers frequently get busy signals. Last year, the number of complaints about online brokerages rose 330 percent, while complaints about conventional brokers fell 15 percent.

And many customers find that the low commissions are less of a bargain than they expected. Internet brokerages tend to charge for services provided for free by traditional brokers. For instance, some online firms charge if you want to transfer a foreign security into your account, place a limit order, or ask for the details of a transaction.

Before You Trade Online...

The booming stock market has made many Web investors wealthier, but others have lost money trading stocks online. Here are seven things you should do before you make your first electronic trade.

ASSESS YOUR NEEDS. Most online brokerages provide some information about companies, but you won't get recommendations on which stocks to buy or sell. If you're not comfortable acting on your own research, use a conventional full-service brokerage. Also, online trading is so easy it can be hard to resist the urge to make a lot of trades. If you think you'll get swept up in the excitement of trading online, a broker can talk you out of rash moves.

SHOP AROUND. There are now more than 100 online brokerages. Their commissions range from \$5 to more than \$30 per trade. Some charge extra for particular types of trades, real-time quotes, and research reports. Also, find out how you can place a trade if you can't access your account online and how much it will cost.

INVESTIGATE THE BROKERAGE.

When you've narrowed your choices to two or three firms, go to the National Association of Securities Dealers (www.nasdr. com) to find out if there have been complaints about the companies. Also, see what other investors have to say about them on the message boards of The Motley Fool (boards.fool.com); click on Managing Your Finances, then on Discount Brokers, and scroll through the postings.

LOOK TO THE HORIZON. Consider the risks you're willing to take. Will you need the money you're investing in two years or ten? Most financial experts suggest you don't buy stocks with money you'll need within the next five years; it may take that long for a stock to recover from a market downturn.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK. It may seem like all stocks have been rising over the past four years, but plenty have done poorly. Most experts recommend that you do thorough research to find companies you believe have

long-term growth potential, then buy the stock and hold it for several years.

GO TO THE LIMITS. Your brokerage will buy or sell a stock at the current price. In a volatile market, you might place an order to sell when the price is \$25, but the trade might be executed at \$18. But if you place a "limit" order to sell a stock at \$25, the brokerage can only sell it for \$25 or more. When you place a limit order to buy, it can only buy that stock at the designated price or lower.

WATCH THE MARGINS. If you plan to trade on margin—that is, borrow the money needed for a trade from your brokerage—read your margin agreement carefully. If your account balance falls below the firm's margin requirement, your broker has the legal right to sell your securities at any time without consulting you. In a falling market, your broker can sell your entire margin account at a substantial loss to you, because the securities in the account have declined in value.

—R.M.

Invest Some Time at These Sites

The Web has a wealth of investment resources. Here are some of the top brokerage, educational, and news and research sites.

Brokerages

CHARLES SCHWAB

www.schwab.com

The largest online brokerage charges \$29.95 for electronic trades of up to 1,000 shares (3 cents per additional share) and a minimum of \$39 for trades through a broker. You get research from Hambrecht & Quist LLC and Credit Suisse First Boston, 100 free real-time quotes per trade, tools for managing your finances, and live customer service around the clock.

DLJDIRECT

www.dljdirect.com

Consistently rated No. 1 by the financial press, DLIdirect charges \$20 per trade—whether handled electronically or placed through a broker—for up to 1,000 shares (2 cents per additional share). It offers mutual fund and stock screening tools; research from Standard & Poor's, Zacks Investment Research, and parent company Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette investment bank; and 100 free real-time quotes per trade.

E*TRADE

www.etrade.com

Commissions at the second biggest online brokerage start at \$14.95 for up to 5,000 shares of stocks listed on the major exchanges (1 cent per additional share). E*Trade charges \$19.95 for Nasdaq stocks, and for limit and stop orders. It offers research from Zacks, Disclosure, and Baseline, but the online brokerage has suffered outages and is often criticized on bulletin boards for poor customer service.

EDUCATIONAL SITES

GOMEZ

www.gomez.com

Before you sign up with an online

brokerage, visit this site created by Gomez Advisors, an electronic commerce research company. It rates the online brokerages and offers reviews. You can sort the scorecard by ease of use, resources, overall cost, and other criteria, or by the type of investor you are: hyper-active trader, serious investor, life goal planner, or one-stop shopper.

INVEST-O-RAMA!

www.investorama.com

You'll find interesting articles here, such as "Ten-Minute Guide to Understanding Proxy Statements" and "International Stocks: Should You Still Own Them?" But what really makes this site useful is its directory of financial and investment sites on the Web.

NETSTOCK DIRECT

netstock.com

You don't have to use a brokerage to invest in stocks. This site shows you how to buy shares directly from companies such as Home Depot and General Electric without paying a commission.

U.S. SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION'S OFFICE OF INVESTOR EDUCATION AND ASSISTANCE

www.sec.gov/oiea1.htm

This site has basic information for first-time investors, as well as articles on how to avoid online investment scams, tips for online investing, interactive tools for comparing mutual fund costs, and more.

News, Research and Portfolio Tracking

DAILYSTOCKS.COM

dailystocks.com

If you're doing research on a company, this is the place to start. Type in the stock's ticker symbol in the Gigablast Research window, hit Go, and you get hundreds of relevant links organized by categories, including charts, discussion forums, and historical quotes.

MSN Investor

investor.msn.com

This well-designed site lets you set up a portfolio to track your stocks for free. You also get access to historical pricing and charts, as well as how-to articles on investing. For \$9.95 per month (\$6.95 for MSN members), you get news alerts and access to analysts' recommendations, company earning estimates, stock screening tools, and other advisory services.

S&P Personal Wealth

www.personalwealth.com

Some articles produced daily by Standard & Poor's reporters and analysts are available for free. But for \$9.95 per month (\$26.95 per quarter, or \$99.95 per year), you get financial planning advice; the ability to create a portfolio; access to news, market intelligence, and analysis; and research on 9,400 publicly traded companies and 8,500 mutual funds.

THESTREET.COM

www.thestreet.com

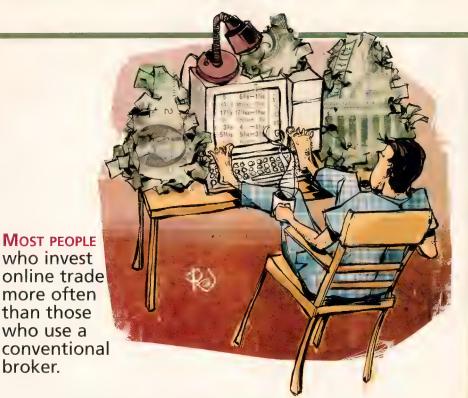
Started by investment guru James J. Cramer, this site offers free market commentary and opinionated feature articles. For \$9.95 per month (\$99.95 per year), you get access to all of the content on the site.

YAHOO! FINANCE

quote.yahoo.com

You can quickly set up a portfolio of the stocks you own or are watching, and then this free, fast-loading site—it skimps on graphics—provides links to charts, research, and recent news.

---R.M.



The SEC and the New York Attorney General's office are looking into complaints that some online brokerages aren't getting their customers the best price on stocks they buy and sell. When you place an order to buy 100 shares of a stock at the current market price, say around \$20, your Internet brokerage forwards it to a market maker firm, which matches you with someone who wants to sell 100 shares of the same stock at around the same price.

broker.

A traditional market maker earns money from the spread-the difference between the price at which it buys the shares from the sellers and the price at which it sells them to you. But many Internet brokerages use new electronic communications networks (ECNs), which match buyers and sellers through software. Problem is, the ECNs are small, and they're not linked to each other. So let's say your online brokerage routes your buy order to an ECN where the best price is \$21, but another ECN has an order for someone selling the same stock for \$20.25. You wind up paying 75 cents more per share, which amounts to \$75 more on the 100 shares.

Since the ECNs pay some brokerages for their orders, it's not in the brokerages' interest to make sure they're getting customers the best price. But not all customers feel this is a widespread problem. "I've been getting good execution," says Bernard Derringer, the retired marketing executive, who watches prices carefully. "I've never had a problem. I'm very happy with Vanguard's service."

The Deep End

There's also growing concern among regulators and market watchers that online investors are contributing to a rise in market volatility. The total value of the assets held in online accounts has soared to \$420 billion in just five years, according to Piper Jaffray. While that's still small compared to the \$1.4 trillion in assets controlled by customers of Merrill Lynch & Co., online trades now account for 14 percent of all stock trades, up from 7 percent in 1997.

There have been many press reports about socalled day traders-people who quit their jobs to

Online Trade-offs

invest full time. Day traders tend to trade on momentum. They see Yahoo's stock going up, buy several thousand shares, and sell it a few minutes later for an eighth of a point or more. "With the advent of technology, you now have speculators that can take short term positions that cause extreme volatility," says David Lackey, president of Weiss Ratings. "You can now monitor price movements second by second and be in and out of a stock in minutes. That just wasn't possible before."

Others are less sure day traders are having much impact on the market, because no one knows just how many day traders there are. "The media has given these guys more attention than they deserve," says James Punishill, an analyst at Forrester Research, a Cambridge, Mass., technology research firm. "At most,

REGULATORS WORRY THAT advertisements by online brokerages encourage aggressive investing.

there are 100,000 day traders in the whole country."

But an NFO Worldwide survey found that most people who invest online trade more often than those who use a conventional broker. "The average online investor is trading 11.4 times over six months, an increase of 18 percent since we did our last survey six months ago," says Lee Smith, a vice president at NFO. "People who trade through a conventional broker are trading 2.6 times in a six month period, a decrease from 5.6 trades."

And that's one of the biggest concerns about online investing: It's so easy and the market has been so strong for so long that people may be investing reck-

Web Extra

The Web is being used to manipulate the share prices of stocks. To learn more about this—and find out how you can avoid becoming the victim of a scam—see "Online Fraud" on FamilyPC's home page (www.familypc.com).

lessly. The owner of the medical supplies company now trades 20 to 40 times a month, compared with about three trades a month before he starting investing online. "I've always been a speculative

investor, but more so now than ever before," he says. He adds doing your own research contributes to the urge to gamble: "You think you're smarter, so you take more risks."

Homemaker Jessica Ring also finds she's more active since opening an online account. "I've made about

10 to 15 trades over the past six months," she says. "Trading online is so much easier than calling your broker."

Most personal finance experts counsel against trading often, which increases your commissions and capital gains taxes. I knew this, but after I made money on Apple, I took the proceeds and invested some of it in Cisco Systems, one of the biggest network equipment manufacturers, at \$64 per share. I used the rest to buy 75 shares of Adobe Systems, a graphics software company touted in an article in *SmartMoney* magazine, at \$39.75. A few months later, Adobe's stock price fell to \$25. I bailed, taking a loss of more than \$1,100. I still have my Cisco stock, which has risen above \$110, but several other bad trades convinced me to do more homework before making investments.

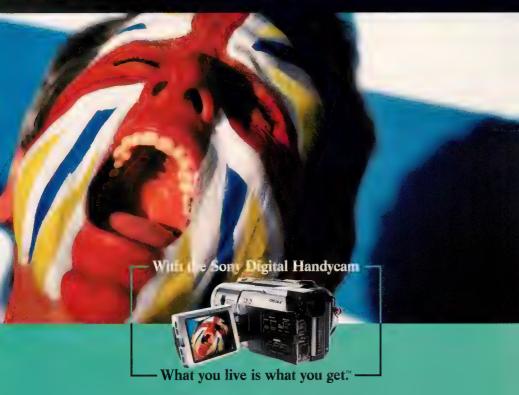
Still, I've been fairly prudent. I've kept all of my retirement money and college funds for my children in mutual funds and invested only money I could afford to lose. But there's mounting evidence that this isn't the case with a lot of online traders. NFO Worldwide found that online investors, on average, have 47 percent of their portfolio in individual stocks, compared with 20 percent for other Internet users. "Those that invest online have higher percentage of their holdings in individual stocks," says NFO's Smith. "That could mean they are switching out of funds."

Regulators worry that advertisements by online brokerages encourage this kind of aggressive investing. In one ad for Ameritrade (www.ameritrade.com), two women finish their jog and go inside to the computer. After a few clicks of the mouse, one woman says: "I just made \$1,700." The other replies sheepishly that she invests in mutual funds. In a speech in May, SEC chairman Arthur Levitt cited the ad as one that borders on irresponsibility. "What's the implication of the message here?" he asked. "Has it become passé to invest for the longer term and to diversify your risk?"

Under pressure from the SEC and state regulators, some Internet brokerages have begun to tone down their ads. But NASAA's Skolnik says the industry has to do more to educate people about the pitfalls of investing aggressively in the stock market. "We've been transformed in a short time from a nation of savers to a nation of shareholders," he says. "I'm concerned that many small investors may not be aware that markets can be volatile. People need to understand that the market can go down, and you can lose money."

Robert Marks writes frequently about finance and business. He lives in New York with his wife and two sons. Send e-mail to fpcletters@zdnetmail.com to share your comments on this story.

Screaming out of joy, screaming out of excitement, or screaming because he's allergic to face paints. Regardless, he's never looked better.



Now you can play back exactly what you lived with the Sony Digital8 Handycam® camcorder. We've extended the most popular format, 8mm, and made it digital. Digital8 offers better picture quality than VHS or VHS-C with twice the sharpness and three times the color information! Plus all Sony Digital8 Handycam camcorders record digitally on standard 8mm² or Hi8™ cassettes and are fully loaded with up to ten hours³ of Stamina® battery power, LaserLink™ wireless playback, NightShot™ infrared capability to shoot in total darkness, and SteadyShot® picture stabilization. It all makes life worth reliving. To order a Video brochure on all Sony Handycam camcorders, call 1-800-295-0693. \$4.95 for shipping and handling. (MC, VISA, AMEX accepted.)



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Buy One Toy and Your Second Toy is FREE* at ToyTime.com!

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Limit one free toy per customer and per address. Cannot be combined with any other offer. Offer ends October 31, 1999.





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School PC

A Special Section for Teachers and Parents

Next on the **Agenda**

In an election year, the administration prioritizes next steps.

President Clinton's goal of having all classrooms wired by the year 2000, the administration is looking ahead to the next set of challenges," said Linda Roberts, director of the Department of Education's Office of Education Technology, to a group of teachers and administrators at the National Educational Computing Conference in June.

At the top of the list is closing the digital divide—the gap between communities that have extensive access to computer resources and those that do not. The goal is to provide all students with equal access to computers. And, as Roberts noted, learning how to use a computer is important for inner city and rural students as they compete for jobs with their peers from more affluent districts.

One of the DoE's new grants, the \$10 million Community Technology Centers grant, will fund programs that provide computer centers in rural, inner city, or any economically distressed areas. The Department received 700 applications in the first round, which ended in June. "Teachers and communities in poor areas need to have the same resources as those available in rich communities," Roberts said. For more details, go to www.ed.gov/of fices/OVAE/CTC.

The DoE's other priority for the new millenium is to increase support and programs for teacher training in technology. "We don't tell doctors about a new medical technique and then ask them to go home and learn it on their own time," said Roberts. "We have to give teachers that same professional respect. We need to spend more time and provide greater resources."

A new \$75 million grant program, Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to Use Technology, will create a collaboration of higher-education faculty and student teachers to develop technology-rich curricula and teaching strategies that future teachers can use when they get into the classroom. Find out more at www.ed.gov/teachtech.

—Valle Dwight



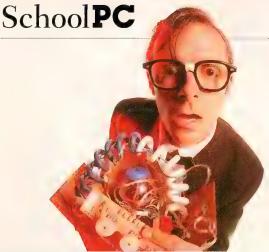
PRESIDENT CLINTON and Earvin "Magic" Johnson visit some of the nations most impoverished neighborhoods and schools.

Announces Next Round of Teachers' Technology Grants

Regular readers of SchoolPC know that FamilyPC, with the help of our advertisers, makes grant monies available to help teachers integrate technology in the classroom. We're proud to announce the beginning of another round of grants beginning with this issue.

To apply for a grant, visit us at SchoolPC.com and print or download our application. Or you can write to us at Teachers' Technology Grants c/o FamilyPC, 28 E. 28th St., New York, NY 10016-7930.

The deadline for applications is October 31, 1999. All applications will be judged by the hardworking, super-dedicated FamilyPC Board of Advisors. Read more about them at SchoolPC.com. Winners will be announced in the March issue.



Technology Spending, by the Numbers

Schools spent an estimated \$5.4 billion on instructional technology in 1998-99, vs. \$1.1 billion on administrative technology (Quality Education Data).

The student-to-computer ratio dropped to 6.3:1 in 1997-98, down from 19.2:1 in 1991-92. The Department of Education recommends a 5:1 ratio (Market Data Retrieval).

Most school districts (66.4%) spent less than \$10 per student for software in 1998-99 (OED).

6 In 1998, 35.7% of public-school teachers said they had no formal training on how to use the Internet, and 36% of K-12 schools in 1997-98 offered no technology-related courses to teachers (MDR and OED).

Schools spent an estimated \$125 million on special education software in 1997-98, a 30-percent increase from the year before (Education Turnkey Systems).

-from The 1999 Education Market Report K-12, a report compiled by the Software and Information Industry Association

Thimk Ques()

Techie Pride

October 5 is the first-ever National Techies Day, a day to celebrate technology professionals and promote science and technology learning in schools. Over the next four years, the demand for technology professionals is expected to double while the number of graduates with technology degrees declines. Techies Day in Schools, one of the initiatives, is meant to stimulate student interest in technology and tech careers. For information on the day's events or to get ideas to celebrate Techies Day in your school, go to www.techiesday.com.

Teachers' Turn

ThinkQuest, the celebrated Web-page design contest for students, has been extended to teachers. ThinkOuest for Tomorrow's Teachers, which is open to K-12 teachers, student teachers, and college faculty, invites you to create Web-based curricula for K-12 class-

rooms. A new round of contests began last month and runs throughout the school year. All of the entries will be posted at ThinkQuest's Web site (www.thinkquest.org) to encourage teachers to adopt these great ideas in their classrooms.

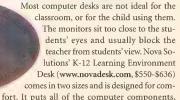


Your School and Y2K

Does your school use Jostens Learning software (www.jostenslearn ing.com)? If the answer is yes, check out Jostens' Year 2000 Inspection and Update Service, which checks your school's hardware and network

operating systems to see if they are Y2K-compliant. The company will assess each school's Y2K-readiness and prepare a checklist of what needs to be done. The service costs \$350 for the first file server, and \$30 per workstation (with a minimum of five workstations). Additional file servers are \$125.

Easy on the Eyes



including wires and monitor, under the desk, leaving the desktop free. The monitor is recessed and is visible under a shatterproof sheet of glass. According to the company's ergonomic research, looking at the screen from above reduces stress on a child's eyes.

ELEMENTARY

One Size Never Fits All

o one software program is ever appropriate for every student, but the Learning Company hopes that its A.D.A.P.T. Learning Technology will make its popular titles appropriate for the widest range of students. The new feature customizes each activity to the child's ability, and is available in the new Reader Rabbit and ClueFinders titles (www.thelearningco.com; Win95/98 and Mac). Children start with an assessment test that gauges strengths and weaknesses, and resets the activities at the appropriate level. As the child improves his or her skills, the program automatically adjusts



to keep the material challenging. Each software package includes a second CD, called the Personalized Learning Center, that adults can use to track a child's progress and print out workbooks with targeted lessons for more help.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Bums to the Rescue

avigating the middle-school years can be tough on teenagers. They're confronting pressures from everyone: peers, parents, teachers, and coaches. Most of the time they don't understand the source of their angst, never mind the solution. Enter The Basement Bums, a life-skills program developed by the San Francisco Unified School District and Little Planet Publishing (www.little plan et.com, \$349; includes six CDs and a teacher's CD) to help teens understand and tackle dilemmas. The CD stars four

teens facing typical social, personal, and academic challenges, including goal-setting, smoking, and addiction. When the teens transform into The Basement Bums, they join together to analyze and solve their problems. After watching a comic-book-style story, students review the key issues, answer questions, and write personal essays. The teacher's CD has more exercises and activities to explore the themes.



HIGH SCHOOL

Advanced Placement Online

igh-achieving students can now look to the Web for online Advanced Placement courses. In all of the five classes offered by APEX (www.apex.netu.com), students follow a one- or two-semester AP program at their own pace. They get online support from experienced AP teachers and can interact with fellow students as they move through the course. Tuition, at \$395 per course, per semester, includes online instruction and supervision by an experienced AP teacher, unlimited access to class materials, all required texts, and exam exercises based on a real exam. Local teachers can keep close tabs on students' progress through the tracking program.



SchoolPC

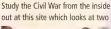
Teachers' Pets

The Science Spot (kato.theramp.net/sciencespot) In the Science Classroom section teachers will find all the ingredients needed to make test tubes bubble. Check out the two dozen lessons and worksheets with enticing titles like Amazing Marshmallows. Head to the Trivia section to get your students thinking.

ShortCourses in Digital Photography (www.short courses.com/index.htm)

Find out how to get the most from your school's digital camera. There's also information on camera care, graphic file formats and photo printers.

The Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War (jefferson.village.vir ginia.edu/vshadow2)





communities, one Northern and one Southern, during the mid-19th century. The countless excellent sources of information include newspapers, letters, diaries, photographs, maps, and more.

Peace Corps Kids World (www.peacecorps.gov/kids) At this site, kids in grades 3-7 can join Trayeler a guide dog as she jou

join Traveler, a guide dog, as she journeys to all the countries where Peace Corps volunteers work. It's a great

Property S

place to research geography and social studies projects, or to just learn about how the rest of the world lives.



Project Cyber-Albany: History Meets Technology

by Cristine Santo

ou don't have to tell the boys at the Albany Academy in Albany, N.Y., that history repeats itself. They've recreated it in a movie, as part of Project Cyber-Albany, a year-long, multidisciplinary, multimedia study of the city's neighborhoods as they were in the year 1899.

In the project (completed last spring), teams of 7th- and 8th-graders researched each of Albany's 14 neighborhoods. Armed with laptop computers and digital cameras, they knocked on the doors of historic homes, and they interviewed prominent historians. The students also conducted research online, pored through library stacks, and visited museums. After uncovering the distinctive flavor of each section of the city, the teams developed characters who may have lived in those neighborhoods at that time, and used those characters to tell Albany's tales, both on the school's Web site (www.Albany-Acad emy.org) and in a movie (also on the Web site).

The project was the brainchild of middle-school headmaster Douglas Parker, along with several other teachers. From the beginning, Parker and his colleagues planned the project carefully, both to keep the production running smoothly and to provide replicable plans for other schools. For details, look at the section of the site called Developing Urban Cultural Research.

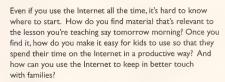
"Because it was an interdisciplinary project, we built a number of classes around it all year long," says Parker. In math class, for example, students figured out the 1999 value of 1899 money and calculated how long it would take to get to specific destinations by trolley.

"We're a school that embraces technology," says Parker, "but not every school is ready to do what we did." If your school is still technology-shy, Parker advises starting out by just having fun and giving people plenty of space and encouragement. "We designed our project to have enough time to explore the technology in a comfortable way," he says. "We also made sure the students would meet with visible successes early on."

What's next for the cyber-historians? The future, of course. "Next year, we'll add a sister site," says Parker. "Instead of going back 100 years, we'll go forward 100 years, trying to make some good guesses about what Albany will look like at that time."

Trying to figure out how the Internet fits into your classroom?

Start here.



It seems like there ought to be an easy way to do all that.

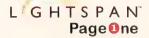
Well now there is.

There's a tool that lets you find the best educational resources for the lesson that you're teaching tomorrow — without staying up all night searching. There's a tool that lets you help kids spend time on Web activities that reinforce your lessons, not Web sites that distract them. There's a tool that lets you — without having to learn Web programming — put homework assignments and classwork on the Web for kids' families to see.

Welcome to Lightspan PageOne.

To find out more about Lightspan PageOne, call I-888-4 ALL KIDS, or visit www.lightspan.com





SchoolPC

Goodbye Bake Sales

High-tech fund-raising turns mouse clicks into money for schools

by Cristine Santo

ast year, while on the Fund-raising Committee at my son's school, I had the brilliant idea of selling gift certificates from our local supermarket. It seemed simple enough: The school would buy \$5,000 worth of gift certificates at a discounted price of \$4,750. After selling them to parents at face value, the school would keep the \$250 difference.

Unfortunately, selling the certificates turned out to be harder than stopping food fights in the cafeteria. By the end of the year, after trying countless sales strategies, I ended up buying the remainder of the cursed things myself, just to be done with it.

By contrast, Jan Ackley, PTA president at the Olympic View Elementary School in Lacey, Wash., spent a mere five hours putting together an online auction through WebCharity.com (www.webcharity.com), raising \$1,400 for her school in two weeks. How? Rather than soliciting auction items from local businesses, Ackley sent a form letter to production companies requesting autographed memorabilia from celebrities. After receiving 20 items, including animation cells from movies, Ackley posted the items on her WebCharity.com page and watched as they sold, mostly to strangers.

As budgets tighten, and as bake, magazine, and candy sales fail to fill the void, schools are scrambling for new ways to earn cash for everything from new computers to playground equipment to field trips. Stepping in slowly and starting to gain momentum are technology-based fund-raising projects such as online auctions, shop-to-give programs, and innovative packages by Internet service providers. The good news about these programs is they're safe for kids (no door-to-door sales, no handling of cash); non-fattening for parents; and extract money from farflung friends, relatives, and strangers, rather than the same pool of generous, local souls.

While these programs vary in complexity and effectiveness, you're certain to find one that suits your needs and helps fill the piggy bank.

Banging the Virtual Gavel

All over the Internet, people are going crazy for online auctions. So



Management

Software Keeps Auctions Running Smoothly

Many schools have been holding live and silent auctions for years. Although the auctions can bring in huge amounts of money (a school in Buffalo makes more than \$100,000 a year from its auction), managing the flow of bidders, items, and dollars is complicated. Auction-management software lets schools produce catalogs, create invoices, automate bid sheets, track items, print mailing labels, and develop reports. Here are four packages to consider:

- Auction Maestro (www.maestrosoft.com)
- Auction! (www.auctionsystems.com)
- √ Visual Auction 3.0 (www.beyondsolutions.com)
- Sold II (www.soldii.com)



WebCharity.com, Yahoo!Auctions (auctions. yahoo.com), and eBay (www.ebay.com) all offer self-service-style online auctions especially for non-profits, and they all work in a similar way: You register your school, fill out forms, provide pictures of your auction items-then sit back and watch while people bid on those items during the auction's "live" period. Friends and relatives can head directly to your school's auction page, while strangers will find your items by browsing through category listings that show all the merchandise available on the site.

Of the three sites, Web- Charity.com offers the best deal for schools: It's free for non-profits (buyers pay a 10-percent premium on items purchased to cover the site's costs), easy to use, offers lots of help, promotes your auction through advertising banners at other sites, handles the financial transactions, and gives your school 100 percent of the profits. If you're uncomfortable with the premium, consider YahoolAuctions. It's easy to use and free for both the buyer and the seller, though you'll have to handle the exchange of money and goods yourself. EBay is not the best option for cash-strapped schools, as it charges sellers listing fees and commissions on sold items.

A Slice of the Pie

If auctions are not right for your school, how about raising money while you do your everyday shopping? With online shop-to-give programs (also called support-shopping), you register your school at a site such as iGive.com (www.igive.com), Schoolpop (www.schoolpop.com), YourSchoolShop.com (www.yourschoolshop.com), or The American School Directory's school store (www.asd.com). These sites are affiliated with dozens of popular online vendors selling everything from music and flowers to clothes and computers. You tell everyone you know to shop online by starting at your designated shop-to-give site. When they buy something, your school can get up to 20 percent of the selling price, though 5 to 8 percent is typical. In general, these programs feature the same prices as the vendors themselves, and—thanks to special promotions—are sometimes even better.

Ron White, the orchestra director at A&M Consolidated High School in College Station, Texas, says there's no down side to support-shopping: "We made about \$1,500 last year."

Todd Burns, principal of Hemingford Elementary School in Hemingford, Neb., says his school earned \$1,700 for 20 minutes' worth of work by each of his students, after signing up with ASD's School Store. "Each student sent out nine post-cards telling people they could buy magazines online through this program," says Burns. "We were very surprised at how well it worked out."

Shop-to-give programs are especially helpful for schools in disadvantaged areas, where traditional fund-raising efforts have fallen short. "Because Schoolpop reaches out to an expanded base of alumni, relatives, and parents' employers, many more people are able to help support our school, so it takes the burden off students' families," says Jeff Rochin, technology coordinator at San Jose High Academy in San Jose, Calif.

Of course, not every school is raking in the cash. Many fundraising committee members we talked with said their efforts with shop-to-give programs were fairly new, and that they were still struggling with the two biggest stumbling blocks: letting people know about the program and getting them to make their first purchase.

Get Wired, Get Cash

One national Internet service provider, Internet Plus (www.int plus.com), gives money back to schools in a variety of ways: when you sign up for Internet service, when you shop with affiliated online vendors, and when your school puts advertising banners on its Web site (which Internet Plus creates as part of a full intranet system).

Let Them Eat Cake

When you're done earning much-needed funds for your school, reward yourself with a piece of cake; after all, don't you still have four boxes of Devil's Food mix in the pantry, just waiting for a bake sale?

Does your school have high-tech fund-raising thoughts? Send them to fpc_pace@zd.com.

Using the Net

68% access the Internet for information to use in their lessons.
73% go online at school, at home, or both.

The Conditional Sci

- The No. 1 way teachers utilize the Internet: to have students do research and gather information.
- Web searching is the third most common use of computers by students at school, after word processing and use of CD-ROMs.
- 16% of teachers communicate by e-mail with teachers from other schools as often as 5 times during the school year.
- Close to 90% of teachers consider e-mail and Web access either valuable or essential to their teaching.

Source: Internet Use by Teachers, Henry Becker, April 1999





Help&Advice

■ Professor Poor's Question of the Month

New
Homes
for Old PCs



I have a bunch of old computers (286's, 386's, 486's) that I would like to either dispose of or sell to someone. I thought of donating them, but aren't most places better off with new systems? Can you offer any suggestions?

-Bruce Emerson

Dear Bruce,

Donating older PCs to schools or non-profits is a good idea as long as the computers are in good, working condition, and the organization is willing to accept them. Although a newer system is ideal, a donated older computer can still run DOS applications. A 286 can handle basic word processing, or it can run a voice mail system. Microsoft's Internet Explorer 3.0 for Windows is still available, so folks can surf the Web on old 386 and 486 systems, though they shouldn't expect to break any speed records.

—Alfred Poor

How to Prepare a System to Give Awa

Make sure your old PC is in working order before you deliver it. And check the organization's donation policies before you drop off the system.

- Include the software license, manuals, and original disks for any program applications.
- Provide all system hardware documentation that you can locate.
- Reformat the hard disk and reinstall the operating system.
- Donate books or training materials that might be useful and that you don't need any more.

Recycle that PC

If your PC is beyond donation, don't just heave it into the trash. Computer components contain toxic materials such as lead, so it's best to dispose of them safely. A new industry is cropping up to meet this need, and you may find a company in your area that recycles electronic equipment and salvages the material. Many only accept equipment by the truckload from corporations or the government. But the Computer Recycle Center in Bedford, Texas, (www.recycles.com) will accept single computers. You have to pay the shipping cost, but they'll make sure your PC is disposed of properly.

Send questions to Professor Poor, FamilyPC, 28 East 28th Street, New York, NY 10016-7930, or to alfred poor@zd.com, For more Professor Poor tips, go to www.zdhelp.com.



C HP Deskuet 1600C Cold

Teb-delimited Disk File

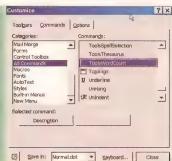
42 / DDMI Dv Orientation

Prot Range @ All

C Pages From

■ Reference Desk

o remove a button that you don't want from the toolbar (maybe you never use the single-space button), hold down the Alt key as you click on the button and drag it off the toolbar. To add a new button for any command, such as macro, font, or style, choose Tools and then Customize, Select the Toolbar tab and check the box in front of the command you want. Icons will appear; drag the right one to the toolbar.



Quicken 99: Importing Lists

Quicken 99 provides an easy way to print a list of your account categories or to bring a balance statement into a spreadsheet program for further analysis. Just open the list or report you want to print, and choose File Print. In the Print window, select Tab-delimited Disk File-a format that most word processors and spreadsheets can translate—and you're good to go.

Windows 98: Icon Problems

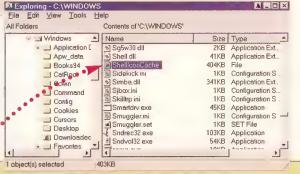
Io [

Canca

Help

If the icons on your Desktop get fuzzy or I miscolored or have the wrong picture, it may be that their cache file is corrupted. To fix the problem, follow these steps:

- * Reboot your PC.
- * When you see the "Starting
- Windows" screen, press the F8 key. * Choose Safe Mode from the menu.
- * Open Windows Explorer.
- * Choose View /Options.
- * Select the option that lets you see Hidden files.
- * In the Windows folder. right click on the ShelllconCache file.
- * Select Delete.
- * Restart Windows in normal mode.



World Wide Web: Successful Searches

There are millions of pages of information on the Web, and, amazingly, that number grows daily. How can you find the needle of information that you want in this digital haystack? A good search engine helps, but they all have different strengths. Choose the site that suits the way you search:

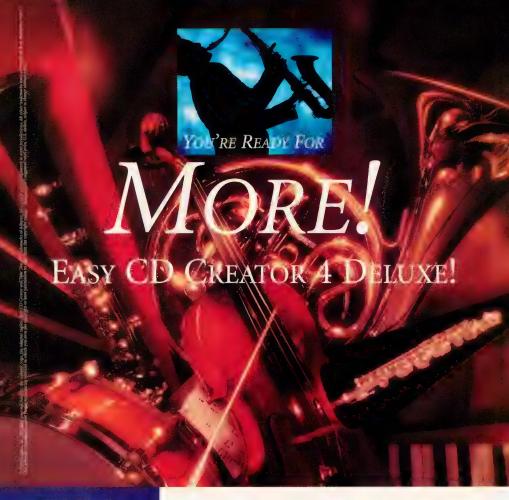
General sites: AltaVista (www.altavista.com), Lycos (www.lycos.com), and InfoSeek (www.infoseek.com) Organized by category: Yahoo! (www.yahoo.com), About.com (www.about.com)

Broadest search (every word is indexed): Excite (www.excite.com), Northern Light (www.north ernlight.com)

Be sure to check each site's search tips. For example, most let you put a phrase in quotes—"word processing"—so that it is searched for as a single term, and not separate words.

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Easy CD Creator™4 Deluxe brings you a world of ways to make your own kind of music. It goes way beyond the software that came with your CD-Recorder, and all earlier Deluxe editions, so you can take the fun even further. Now you can pull MP3 tracks and other music from the Internet, as well as from LPs and cassettes. New Easy CD Creator 4 Deluxe, Only \$99%

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For details on the Easy CD Creator 4 Deluxe Rebate Offer see your retail store or contact us at: http://cdr.adaptec.com/fpcm or 1-800-442-7274 x3948.



■ Geek Garage

Don't Let 'er Flicker!

The image you see on a monitor screen is drawn or "refreshed" many times per second. If this refresh rate is too slow, the screen appears to flicker. Some people are more sensitive to this than others, and you're more likely to notice it on a large screen. Eliminate flicker by raising the monitor refresh rate until the flicker disappears. We recommend a refresh rate of 85 hertz (Hz) where the image

is redrawn 85 times per second. But don't

raise the refresh rate higher than necessary, because that will decrease the image quality.

Hit the Road

- Service Comments



What's in a Name? Notebook servens

A though notebooks come with the state of th

- Passive matrix: older, less-expensive to active matrix displays. Also called STN (Super week the control of the
- >> DSTN: "dual-scan" technology for passive matrix displays are into quality by dividing the screen into two parts, each with its own light source
- ➤ Active matrix: more expensive technology that provides a light source for each individual pixel. Creates a better image that's sharp enough for fullmotion video. Also called thin-film transistor (TFT) technology.
- ➤ Wide-angle LCD: passive matrix LCDs are hard to view from above, below or to the side. Using technology such as horizontal addressing, active matrix panels have a wider viewing angle.

Still Going?

Help your notebook battery run as long as it can with these tips.

- >> Use your computer's powermanagement options to power-down the hard disk when it's idle for more than a few minutes.
- ➤ Turn down the screen's backlight to the lowest brightness you need to see the image.
- → Remove PC Cards, such as modems or network adapters, when you're not using them.



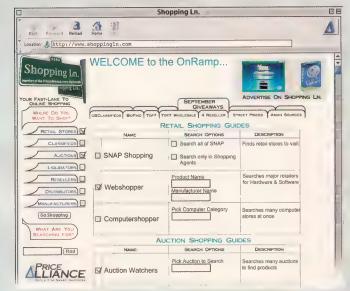
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Hands On

Create a Personalized Mouse Pad

What you need: Any digital image, Internet access, and a custom photo Web

site such as pix.com

Platform: Win95/98 and Mac Time required: 10 minutes

Cost: \$11.95

customized mouse pad is a fun and practical way to share your child's favorite piece of digital art or a treasured family photograph. To create one for yourself or to give as a gift, all you need is a digital image and a few minutes at an online photo shop such as the pix.com Web store (www.pix.com). Here's how we did it:



1. Go to the Site

Go to www.pix.com and click on the Gifts section. Next, scroll through the menu of available picture gift items, and choose Mouse Pad.

2. Find the Picture Basket

When the mouse pad gift page opens, click Put My Picture on this Item and then click Choose Your Picture. The next page shows you all the available images in your Picture Basket. If you've never used pix.com before, the basket will be empty.



Choose Your Picture

To add a picture to the basket, click Get New Picture, Follow the instructions on the next page to browse your hard drive and locate your desired image. Once you've found the picture you wish to use, click Continue and the image automatically uploads to your Picture Basket. You can repeat this process several times if you want more than one picture gift.

4. Pick a Number

Once you've uploaded the photo, a new page opens showing a thumbnail of the photo you selected in the Picture Basket. Now click on the picture you want to use for your mouse pad. Indicate the number of mouse pads you want to order, put the number in the quantity box, and click Add to Cart.

Pay the Tab

On the next page, you'll see your finished order. At this point you can either shop for other items or pay for your mouse pad. At the checkout, fill in your shipping address and credit card information and the mouse pad will be on its way to you in a few days. -Bonny L. Georgia



How to do it

How to scan and e-mail a photo from their scanner.

One small step for scanners. 13 fewer steps for you.

Let's face it, most scanners are not as simple as they are supposed to be.

Drop in your original. Push a button. It's that easy. Hold down a button, change a few settings, and your scanner is practically a whole new machine.

Drag and drop, plug and play, billions of colors, and all the other terms and specs don't make a bit of difference when all you want to do is e-mail a photo, scan a page of text into your word-processor or any of the

your word-processor or any of the other tasks you do countless times a day.

Sure, we have all the specs and features you expect in a quality scanner, but we think you'll be much more impressed with those five friendly buttons up front.

Visioneer OneTouch offers a simpler, more elegant solution. It does most of the work for you, thanks to its tight integration with the PaperPort software.

Visioneer OneTouch.
All scanners should be this simple.



Available in USB and Printer Port models Printer Port models feature pass through design Lift-off lid
 Includes PaperPort software Windows 95/98/NT 4.0 compatible





Family Review Review Partine October '99

On the Periphery

ontrary to published reports, the PC isn't dead—far from it. But that putty-colored box tucked next to your desk is only as exciting as the devices attached to it. Accordingly, this month's Hardware section focuses on a wide variety of sub-\$100 peripherals, ranging from scanners and inkjet printers to U.D. mo. and uninterrupted power supplies. If your system has lost its luster, you don't have to rush out and buy a new PC; a nifty input device or a new set of speakers may resuscitate your tired old computer. In Software, we tackle the back-to-school blues with a roundup of kids' entertainment titles designed to perk up your prodigy between homework sessions. And if you're desperate to sneak in one last round before the weather goes south, check out GameTime and our roundup of PC golf games.

–John Godfrey

Software: You'll find lots of laughs in this roundup



133
GameTime: We'll
help you line up
your next golf
game.



Hardware: Help your system soar with these peripherals



Welcome Additions

15 Cool Toys and Tools for Under \$100

s, including tw exprinters, a ocking station, and a fivepiecy surround-sound speaker system. Admittedly me of the inkjets won't win quality, and the USB file and of instructions. On the r surprising bang for the atures cool software, and rts so you can plug in all cour reviews, count your whedge that sometimes if price tags.



Secretary and

Umax Astra 2000P



Umax, www.umax.com, 800-562-0311; Win95/98; \$99

One might argue that a flatbed scanner is only as powerful as the software that drives it. By that logic, the Umax Astra 2000P is powerful indeed. Not only is the scanner itself capable of 600x1,200-dpi (dots per inch) resolution—surprisingly high for a supposedly entry-level model—but it comes with a wealth of worthwhile software.

The software highlights include Photo-Deluxe 3.0 for image-editing; Presto PageType, for scanning and filling in preprinted forms; Umax Copy Utility, which turns your printer into a copier; and Omni-Page LE, which turns scanned documents into editable text. If there's a downside, it's that all these programs aren't tied into a single interface, as they are in the Visioneer OneTouch scanner (see next review).

VistaScan, the driver that operates the Astra, is refreshingly simple to use. A click of the mouse switches you between Beginner and Advanced modes. (The level of hand-holing varies within each mode.) Novices and experts alike will find themselves comfortable with this interface within minutes.

The parallel-port Astra is no speed

demon, but it produces crisp, colorful scans that are good enough for family and business projects alike.

Takeaway: A lot of scanner and a lot of software for a little cash.

Visioneer OneTouch 5300 USB



Visioneer, www.visioneer. com, 888-229-4172; Win95/98; \$99.99

Most people use flatbed scanners for a few specific purposes: scanning photos, making copies, and faxing documents. And with most scanners, performing any one of those tasks means loading the necessary software and fiddling with the settings to make them match the job. Visioneer's OneTouch 5300 USB boils all that down to the press of a button. Want to make a copy? Press the copy button and a duplicate emerges from your printer. Want to send a fax? Press the fax button and your modem kicks into gear. The OneTouch has a third button for scanning and a fourth one that you can customize to launch the software of your choice, such as your e-mail program.

Setting up the scanner is easy, thanks to its plug-and-play USB interface, although we did have to download a new driver to skirt a system-lockup problem. Visioneer's topnotch PaperPort software handles everything from faxing to electronic filing to optical



RIVELMAND

character recognition, but it doesn't offer any nifty special effects for photos. For that you'll need to use your own image-editing software. Fortunately, opening a scanned photo with that software is as simple as dragging and dropping an icon.

The OneTouch delivers fairly crisp and colorful scans at resolutions up to 300x600 dpi, which is more than adequate for putting photos on the Web and filing phone bills. Though definitely intended more for work than play, this scanner is as easy and convenient as it is affordable.

Takeaway: Finally, a user-friendly flatbed scanner!

To yo

HOUSE SPEAKERS Altec Lansing offers powerful sound at a pretty price.

Speakers
Altec Lansing ACS 54
PowerPlay Plus



Aftec Lansing, www.altec lansing.com, 800-258-3288; Win95/98; \$99

In the real world, sound comes at you from all sides. When you're sitting in front of your computer, sound usually emanates from a pair of speakers in front of you. That's fine for everyday computing, but if you frequently listen to MP3 or CD tunes, or play a lot of games, nothing beats realistic audio. A five-piece speaker system is just the ticket, and Altec Lansing's ACS 54 PowerPlay Plus delivers for a lot less than you'd expect.

The package includes a 20-watt subwoofer and four satellite speakers—two each for the front and back. You'll get true surround-sound effects if your audio card supports two sets of speakers, but the setup works well regardless. Color-coded cables make setup refreshingly easy, and you'll find master- and surround-volume controls conveniently located on the rightfront satellite.

We're impressed by the overall sound quality. Games and music are crisp, loud,

and resonant—and dramatically better when compared with a twospeaker package. True audiophiles may want to hold out for more wattage or fancy features like Dolby ProLogic. But for most folks, the PowerPlay Plus is a superb five-piece package that adds new life to games and music.

Takeaway: A terrific way to immerse yourself in PC sound.

Labtec LCS-2414



To enjoy music CDs and games to the max, you need at least two speakers and a sub-woofer. Such a setup usually costs \$100 or more, but Labtec's LCS-2414 sells for the amazingly low price of \$49. Unfortunately, the subwoofer isn't robust enough to make these speakers worth recommending.

Make no mistake, this is an entry-level sound system—one that's better suited to games than music. The 15-watt subwoofer is a basic square black box about the size of a car battery. The satellites are downright tiny; school-lunch milk cartons are bigger. They belt out loud volume—it's just not great quality.

Music sounds tinny and monotone, while game audio is slightly more robust.

The audio controls consist of a power button on the subwoofer and a volume dial on one of the satellites; there are no controls for modifying bass or treble. Plus, you'll have to remember which direction to spin the dial to change the volume, because there's no indicator on the speaker.

Takeaway: A tempting price, but you'd be much happier with the five-piece package from Altec Lansing.

Color Inkjet Printers Apollo P-1200



Apollo, www.myapollo. com, 877-692-7655; Win98: \$79

This compact, stylish inkjet employs a reliable Hewlett-Packard print engine that produces 600x300 dpi text and 300x300 dpi color—all for the checkbook-friendly price of \$79. Still, compared with the lessexpensive Lexmark printer, the P-1200 suffers from lackluster print quality and sluggish print speed.

The P-1200 is a three-color printer, meaning it employs an ink cartridge containing cyan, magenta, and yellow inks. Because black isn't in the mix, text tends to appear rather grayish. (You can buy a separate black ink cartridge to use when printing text.) On plain paper, text looks fairly crisp, but not nearly laser-quality. Colors appear drab, but become more vibrant when you switch to higher-priced inkiet paper.

The P-1200 is a serious slowpoke. It takes a couple of minutes just to print a single page of text, and photos printed on glossy paper take even longer. Switching to "econofast" mode, which promises faster printing and consumes less ink, doesn't improve the printer's abysmally slow performance.

The P-1200 includes greeting card software and HP's Instant Delivery, which lets you easily print news from the Internet. Even with the software, this printer can't compare to the lower price and better quality of the Lexmark Z11 (see next review). Takeaway: A fine second printer for the kids to use, if you can't find a Lexmark Z11.

Intel Inside ... ViewSonic on top!



Selecting the right PC is only half the battle. Today, how you top it off is just as important. Innovations like multimedia monitors, flat panel displays and large screen CRTs are changing the old phrase "Monitor Sold Separately" to "PC Sold Separately."

Take the G773 for example, ViewSonic's SuperClear™ 17" (16.0 viewable) monitor. The G773 is USB¹ ready allowing you to instantly connect additional USB peripherals while your PC is running.

With 1,024 x 768 resolution at 87Hz and a 0.26 dot pitch, the G773 is the perfect solution for demanding color intensive applications, desktop publishing, presentation design, web development and web surfing.

To fully appreciate the clear advantages of the G773, you need to see it in person at your nearest retailer.

At ViewSonic, we offer the #1 best selling monitors and flat panel displays in the USA*. Buy with confidence from the company that's won over 550 industry awards. The G773 warranty covers 3 years parts and labor. Plus 24-hour customer service, 7 days a week.

For more information on the company that's won over **550** industry awards, visit our website at www.ViewSonic.com/fampc/ or see the G773 at your local CompUSA.





(PC Sold Separately)















Lexmark, www.lexmark. com, 888-539-6275; Win95/98: \$99

The most amazing thing about Lexmark's Z11 Color JetPrinter is not its price tag (a remarkable \$49 after a \$50 rebate), it's the print quality. Text printed on plain paper looks as sharp as that produced by laser printers. And colors look more vivid than we've ever seen from a three-color, single-cartridge printer. Because the Z11 can print at resolutions up to 1,200x1,200 dpi, you can turn digital photos into glossy prints that are almost suitable for framing.

This is not to say the Z11 is the best printer ever created for the home. It's slow, taking at least a minute or two for most single-page print jobs, and unlike the Apollo P-1200, it doesn't come with any graphics or printing software. You can buy black ink cartridges if you plan to print a lot of text, but only a color cartridge comes bundled with the printer. Lexmark does include an excellent quick-start guide and instruction manual, plus a handy card which lists technical support contact information.

Setup is a snap, and Lexmark's statusmonitor utility audibly tells you when a print job has started and finished. (It'l also tell you when ink is low.) The Z11 is appreciably compact, and designed so that it sits flush against a wall. We're hard-pressed to imagine a better printer at this price.

Takeaway: With the rebate, a radically good deal. Buy two, Christmas is coming.

More Hardware
Intel PC Camera Pack



Intel, www.intel.com, 800-538-3373; Win98; \$79

Intel is a company better known for microprocessors, but the PC Camera Pack may make Intel synonymous with family fun. This USB desktop camera (which has a \$10 rebate offer) comes with software for everything from creating video postcards to making Internet phone calls.

Standing less than 2 inches high, the camera comes with a tilt/swivel base that can stick to a monitor or be replaced with a clip-on base suitable for notebooks. A dial on top adjusts focus, and a large "snapshot" button makes it easy to capture still images. There's even a little door in front of the lens that slides shut to keep out dust. The extra-long 7-foot cable is a thoughtful touch: It affords greater flexibility in positioning the camera.

Intel's surprisingly easy-to-use Create

intel

CANDID CAMERA E-mail pictures and video clips with the Intel PC Camera Pack.

& Share software lets you take snapshots, create full-motion movies and video post-cards, and make video phone calls via the Internet. You can even play basketball or pop bubbles: The camera records your body movements to make you feel immersed in the game. You have to go through a somewhat lengthy setup process before you can use the software, but that's a one-time procedure. Our only real complaint is that we found the full-motion video to be a bit jerky, even though the camera was connected to a powerful system running a 400MHz AMD K6-2 processor.

Takeaway: A worthwhile deal on a cool camera with lots of fun software.

Iomega Zip 100MB



lomega, www.iomega. com, 800-697-8833; Win95/98; \$99.95

If you didn't outfit your PC with a Zip drive when you bought it, now's your chance. lomega's ubiquitous removable-storage device, which is suitable for everything from shuffling large files between PCs to backing up important chunks of data, has finally broken the \$100 barrier.

A kind of big brother to the floppy disk drive, the Zip stores 100MB of data on cartridges that cost as little as \$10 a piece. It's much faster than a floppy drive, and a lot more portable. The \$99 external model plugs into any PC's parallel port, so you can move it between different machines with little difficulty. While 100MB seems small in the face of today's gargantuan, multi-gigabyte hard drives, it's still big enough to be practical.

The drive is a snap to install, thanks in part to an excellent instruction manual. lomega also bundles friendly software for making backups, copying disks, and recording multimedia files. The only bummer is that not even a single Zip cartridge is included.

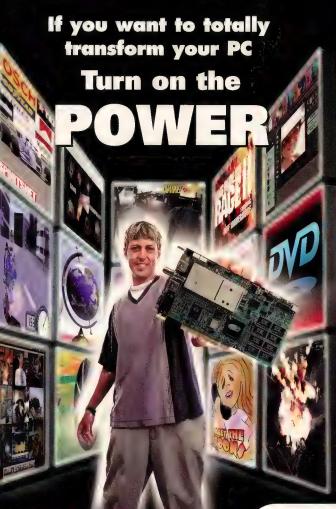
Takeaway: The perfect low-cost storage device. And for \$30 more, you can get the USB model.

Lexar Media Digital Film Reader



Lexar Media, www.digital film.com, 800-789-9418; Win95/98; \$49

If you've ever sat tapping your fingers while your digital camera uploaded pictures to your PC using a serial port, you'll love Lexar Media's Digital Film Reader. This device, available in both CompactFlash and SmartMedia models, lets you transfer pho-





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moving pictures. Iy to your PC, just as you would access a floppy drive. And whereas images move like molasses

through a serial port, they move like lightning through the Film Reader.

> We tested the parallel-port model; an easier-to-use USB version should be available by the time you read this.

Setup is a tad intricate, if only because you must plug the device and your keyboard into a special (included) connector to supply power to the card reader. There's also a pass-through port for reconnecting your printer, which is displaced from the PC's parallel port. (This is where the USB Docking Station, reviewed in this issue, comes in handy.)

After you install the included software, Windows recognizes the Reader as another storage device, complete with its own drive letter. Simply pull the memory card out of your camera, slide it into the Film

Reader, then copy the photos to your hard drive. It takes no more than a couple seconds to copy a 1MB file. Another plus is that your camera's batteries will last longer, because the camera itself is no longer involved in file transfers. For the digital shutterbug, that alone makes the Film Reader a worthwhile purchase.

Takeaway: Saves tons of time transferring digital photos to your PC.

Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer



Everyone knows the adage about building a better mousetrap, but what about building a better mouse? Microsoft has done just that with the IntelliMouse Explorer, a large, four-button critter that employs an optical sensor in place of the traditional rubber ball. Because of this design, there is no need for a mouse pad and no worries

A quick guide to peripheral connectors

Parallel Port

The hardest working port in the biz is also known as the printer port, since printing is its main purpose. The current generation of parallel ports allows two-way communication between a device and a PC. For instance, now printers can send status information about its toner supply, paper level, and jams back to the computer. Parallel ports transfer data at up to 2 MBps.

Though it's been around since the birth of the PC, the parallel port has limitations. There's only one parallel port on a computer, so you have to share that single connector with several devices. To turn one port into two, you can use a pass-through—a two-sided parallel connector that lets you attach both a printer and the second device. Also, you can buy an inexpensive switch box that lets you connect several devices and select which device you want by turning a dial. Be careful though—not all devices are compatible with pass-throughs or switches. For example, Hewlett-Packard printers are notoriously fickle about wanting exclusive use of the printer port, and any printer that uses status-monitoring software may not take kindly to a switch box.

Serial Port

Serial ports, also known as Com ports, are the slowest of the

three listed here, transferring data at a mere 0.012 MBps.

Although they've been used traditionally for modems, hand-held devices, digital cameras, and game gear, most manufacturers are turning to USB as a more efficient connection.

Universal Serial Bus (USB)

USB, a newer type of connection, makes adding peripherals easy; Windows generally recognizes and installs USB devices automatically. You can add and remove any such device that plugs into the USB port while the PC is running—a definite no-no for the parallel port. And the big advantage that USB has over the parallel port is that each USB port can theoretically support as many as 127 individual devices. That eliminates the competition for the parallel port. It also transfers data at up to 1.5 MBps, nearly as fast as the printer port.

USB can also supply power to devices, so in many cases there's no need for a separate AC adapter.

USB works well if you have a PC that's running Windows 98; it doesn't work on Windows 95. The connection isn't good for long stretches across the room, either. Fifteen feet is the maximum length of your USB cable, while parallel port cables can accommodate up to 30 feet.

—Dave Johnson

about the little rodent wearing out.

The sleek, futuristic-looking Intelli-Mouse boasts a silver-and-gray design with a nifty red "tail light" that actually glows. It sports the traditional two buttons. has two "thumb" buttons on the left side. and includes a newfangled-but-useful scroll wheel on top, which features a grooved surface for easier rolling. (Like previous IntelliMice, this one is for right-handers only-lefties protest!)

Using the IntelliMouse driver software, you can program the extra buttons to perform a wide variety of functions, ranging from navigating the Web to copying and pasting text. We like the added functionality, although the location of the buttons makes it too easy to accidentally press one with your thumb. What's more, small hands will likely have a hard time operating this oversize mouse.

The IntelliMouse's speedy USB interface translates to more precise aiming in action games. Add to that a stylish look, a wearfree design, the benefits of extra buttons,

MEMO

and you've got one mighty mouse. Takeaway: Who knew a mouse could be, v'know, cool?

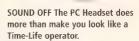
Plantronics PC Headset HS1



Plantronics. www.plantronics.com, 800-544-4660: Win98: \$79.95

Kids love to crank up the volume when they're playing games and listening to music, but that doesn't mean everyone wants to hear it. One way to preserve family harmony is with a good set of headphones. The Plantronics PC Headset HS1 not only delivers hi-fi stereo sound through a pair of large earphones, but it also includes a flexible microphone for use in games, speech recognition, and internet phone calls.

The PC Headset plugs into the headphone and microphone jacks on your computer's sound card. Its 10-foot cord gives you plenty of room to move around, and a plastic clip lets you hook the cord



to your shirt, so it's not constantly getting in the way. A small set of easily accessible controls lets you adjust the headphones' volume and switch the microphone on

Though we have no complaints with its sound quality, the PC Headset is bulky and

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uncomfortable to wear, owing largely to its spring-based sizing mechanism. Of course, comfort is subjective and kids may be more forgiving, especially if they're engrossed in a game that supports voice communications.

Takeaway: An affordable, high-quality headset that some may find uncomfortable.

Skywell Technology Magic Link



"Sneakernet"—copying files to a floppy disk and then walking the disk to the destination PC—is passé. A faster and far more flexible solution is Skywell Technology's Magic Link, which takes advantage of USB to zip files back and forth between PCs. It's ideal for transferring data between desktop PCs and notebooks.

This no-frills package consists of a 6foot cable, which connects to a USB port on each system, and a simple file-transfer utility. Novices take note: The only printed setup instructions are on the box, and they start and end with "install the software and connect the cable." There is a more complete manual on the software disk, but it's still lacking.

Fortunately, anyone familiar with Windows Explorer should have no difficulty with the software, which uses a familiar file-tree metaphor. Copying or moving files is as simple as dragging and dropping icons from the target window to the destination window. USB shuffles data at up to 1.5 MBps, meaning even your largest files transfer in a matter of seconds. And unlike transferring with a floppy, there's no limit to the size of the files you can move.

Takeaway: Inadequate documentation notwithstanding, this simple connection beats sneakernet by a mile.



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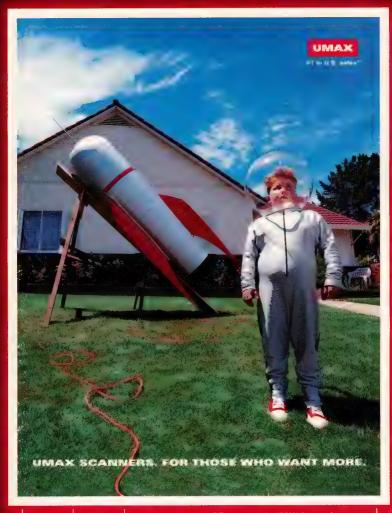
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Harmon

invest in a UPS—not the package-delivery service, but an Uninterruptible Power Supply.

Just plug your PC, monitor, peripherals, and modem cables into the device, and you'll be protected from all the bad things electricity can do—including disappear. Tripp Lite's Internet Office UPS features six surge-protected AC outlets, three of which also provide battery backup in the event of a power failure. Should one occur, you have up to 11 minutes in which to save your work and shut down your PC, a decent amount of time for under \$100.

The cleverly designed Internet Office UPS features widely spaced outlets that can accommodate those bulky power bricks, and sports LEDs that let you know when the battery is in use and low on power. Tripp Lite offers a standard \$25,000 protection policy against damage from power surges and lightning strikes. If you've made a healthy investment in your PC and peripherals, it makes sense to invest another \$100 to keep everything safe.

Takeaway: You've got insurance for your house and car, right?

Hubs

ADS Technologies USB Docking Station



It's common to have too many peripherals and not enough parallel, serial, and USB ports. Case in point: Your digital camera and Palm docking cradle both have serial interfaces, but your PC has only on serial port. Or your scanner requires a parallel port, but you've already got a printer and Zip drive connected to yours.

One effective way to handle this kind of peripheral crunch is with ADS Technologies' USB Docking Station, which not only turns one USB port into three, but also serves up a spare serial port and parallel port. Thus, it's a much better value than devices that simply add a few USB ports or offer serial-to-USB conversion.

Housed in a nifty translucent black shell, the Docking Station is only slightly

larger than a deck of cards. It features five status LEDs (one for each port) and comes with a clearly-illustrated instruction manual. We were pleased to find a 6-foot cable for connecting the device to our PC, rather than the 3-footer listed on the box (a misprint according to ADS). We plugged a printer and digital camera into the Docking Station's parallel and serial ports, respectively, and everything worked like a charm. Long live USB.

Takeaway: Easy and affordable expansion for overcrowded systems.

Entrega 7 Port USB Hub



In today's plug-and-play world, two USB ports just aren't enough to handle a printer, scanner, digital camera, monitor, Zip drive, or any of the hundreds of other available USB peripherals. But that's all you get on most PCs, and usually they're inconveniently located at the rear of the case. The solution to both problems is a hub—a kind of port extender that splits a single USB connector into many. Don't worry about overtaxing your PC; one USB port can reportedly handle up to 127 devices at a time. Alub just compensates for the fact that few USB peripherals have pass-through connectors that let you add more devices.

Entrega's compact, AC-powered USB hub serves up seven USB connectors. Installing the slim rectangular box is as simple as plugging it into one of your PC's USB ports. Any Windows 98 PC should automatically detect the hub's presence and install the necessary drivers, as it did on our test system (though we did need to provide our Windows 98 CD).

You can position the hub on your desk or some other readily accessible location, so you don't have to reach around the back of your PC every time you want to plug in a USB device. Instead, just plug it into the hub, and you're ready to go. Status LEDs on the front of the unit indicate each port's power and activity.

Takeaway: A must-have accessory for any USB-active household.

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starting with too few supplies.

In both titles, kids can choose from several categories of designs, add images and borders to personalize the tattoos, recolor their designs, and print them. Kids typically liked the designs, but expected more from the rudimentary painting and coloring tools.

Making matters worse, the packages only contain enough materials for three small sheets of tattoos, and many testers told us that they ran out before they mastered the innovative but complicated screen-to-skin process. It's easy



to see why they needed the practice: For each tattoo, you print the design on one type of paper, then attach it ink-side-down onto a double-sided adhesive sheet. After that, you cut around the designs, a task that proved difficult because the multiple layers of paper makes it hard to see the images.

Even less kid-friendly are the tattoos themselves, which are more like stickers than tattoos. "I had to have Mommy cut them out," says 6-year-old Bree Luckhurst of New York. "They didn't always stick on good, and they hurt when I took them off." Bree's mom, Nancy Luckhurst, filled in the sad details. "We had tears upon removal," she says. "My daughter had a red raised outline on her shoulder after it was removed. She immediately declared that she didn't ever want them on her skin again."

Nine-year-old Dolores Hammond circumvented this problem by using a surface other than her skin. "I made window decals using Xerox window decal paper," she says. "They looked very cool on the windows because the colors are nice and bright."

Takeaway: Both tattoo programs received low replay scores, and Family Testers complained fiercely about the limited amount of supplies included.

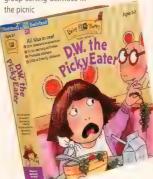
D.W. the Picky Eater

The Learning Company, www.learningco.com, 800-716-8506: Win95/98 and Mac:

Like so many of her peers, Arthur's sassy little sister D.W. has a very particular palate, and she doesn't see the point of eating anything aside from plain spaghetti and pizza. Spinach, sauces, and similar sorts of sustenance have no place in D.W.'s diet until, that is, she makes a delicious discovery in the form of a kids' menu. Though a charming premise for an animated storybook, testers agreed that D.W. the Picky Eater wasn't very satisfying. Kids enjoyed the program the first few times through, but became bored soon thereafter.

"This is a cute product that will appeal to fans of D.W. and Arthur," says Chris Sherman of Meadville, Penn, "That's about where the interest ends. Children will play this program a few times and then return to more exciting titles."

In addition to the storybook, which features highlighted text and plenty of clickable surprises, youngsters can visit some of D.W.'s favorite haunts and participate in a variety of activities. Kids really took to the dollhouse area, where they could decorate the rooms with stamps and colors and print out their creations. They also praised the play in D.W.'s garden, where kids earn points by squirting gophers as they pop up from holes in the ground. The storybook and picnic areas met with more resistance. Parents complained that the storybook had limited printing controls and wasted a tremendous amount of ink. And testers felt that the foodgroup-sorting activities in



zone were too repetitive.

"There is so much more quality software on the shelves today, this one can't compete," says Lynn Eades of Escondido, Calif. "The games had no pizzazz and my child left with no new knowledge of food and nutrition. Even the story was dull and unmoving."

Takeaway: Low scores for replay and fun mean that this gastronomical title doesn't cut the mustard.

SOFTWARE TITLES

Rating

Title
Barbie Totally Tattoos
Hot Wheels Tattoo Designer
D.W. the Picky Eater
Freddi Fish 4: The Case of the Hogfish Rustlers of Briny Gulch
Girls Only Secret Diary
Go Fish
Kid Pilot
The King and I: Animated Thinking Adventure
Winnie the Pooh and Tigger Too: Animated Storybook
The Magic School Bus: Explores the World of Anima
Mia: The Search for Grandma's Remedy
Spy Fox in Cheese Chase
Laura's Happy Adventures

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Girls Only Secret Diary
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The King and I: Animated Thinking Adventure
Vinnie the Pooh and Tigger oo: Animated Storybook
he Magic School Bus: explores the World of Animals
Mia: The Search for Grandma's Remedy
py Fox in Cheese Chase
aura's Happy Adventures
For this month's round asked parents and kids



up, we s to take a serious look at the fun-

stuff-kids' entertainment software. Working in conjunction with Digital Research, we sent them copies of the latest titles and they evaluated the software on satisfaction, ease of use, replay value, and features. Every FamilyTested review published comes with a numerical rating, and here's what the numbers mean:

90-100	Outstanding
85-89	Very good
80-84	Average
79-below	Poor

Freddi Fish 4: The Case of the Hogfish Rustlers of Briny Gulch

Humongous Entertainment, www.humongous. com, 800-499-8386; Win95/98 and Mac; \$29.99

In Freddi Fish's fourth escapade, ruthless rustlers have stolen Cousin Calico's prized hog-fish, and Freddi and her pal Luther need help setting things straight. Like previous titles in Humongous's Junior Adventure series, Freihigh 4 encourages kids to use critical-thinking skills in a playful format. Most testers enjoyed the challenge and Wild West theme, but some felt it was too difficult for kids under age 5 (the box states ages 3 to 8).

"This is great for kids who love challenges and aren't into shoot-'em-ups," says Victoria Carey of Los Angeles. "[It has] very sweet characters and a good use of the computer's capabilities. You couldn't duplicate this on TV or in a book."

As Freddi and Luther explore the Briny Gulch trail, they must look for clues and solve puzzles in the exquisitely hand-drawn underwater world. Along the way they meet a cast of characters, including Freddi's cousin Calico Catfish, tough and tiny Sheriff Shrimp, "Sodaloon" keeper Saltwater Stella, and an ivory-tickling octopus name Eight-Fingered Phil. The characters and clues change every time you launch the program, so kids can replay the adventure with a new twist each time.

The game also features several diverting playtime activities. Oysteroids, a bubble-popping arcade game along the lines of Asteroids, lets kids blow off some steam between sleuthing

blow off some steam between sleuthing sessions, and Sheriff Shrimp's Most Wanted lets kids create

funny posters by mixing and matching features. The Honky-Tonk TubeWorms provide musical accompaniment with tunes such as Hop Along Little Cephalopod and Fishin' Hole Honky-Tonk.

Parents of younger testers said that much of the navigating and puzzle-solving is too tough for preschoolers, and suggested a slightly higher age rating of 5 to 8. Other than that, testers admired the program.

"My daughter was engaged for hours and determined to find the culprits," says Sandy Ott of Ashland, Ky. "[Once] she did, she was bubbling with pride because she did it all on her own. She was also very excited when she realized it changes every time she plays it, because it gives

If you like Freddi Fish...

...you might want to check out these other critical-thinking edutainment titles.

© Barbie Detective

(Mattel Media, FamilyTested Score: 85)

© Fisher-Price Big Adventure Garage

(Knowledge Adventure, FamilyTested Score: 89)

Pajama Sam

(Humongous Entertainment, FamilyTested Score: 89)

© Putt-Putt Enters the Race (Humongous Entertainment, FamilyTested Score: 91)

© Travel the World With Timmy

(Edmark, FamilyTested Score: 89)

her new challenges. It's a wonderfully exciting way to stimulate a child into problem solving." **Takeaway:** Freddi Fish swims away with a recommended score again. Kids loved the game's Wild West theme and the game randomizer, which raised the replay score for parents.



Girls Only Secret Diary

Encore Software, www.encoresoftware.com, 310-342-0600; Win95/98 and Mac; \$19.99

Girls love to keep secret journals, set their schedules, and make personalized stationery, but the youngsters who evaluated Girls Only Secret Diary told us they could do without this electronic organizer. Testers said the program swkward to use and has a poorly implemented help system, and that tasks like diary writing and scheduling are better left to paper and ink.

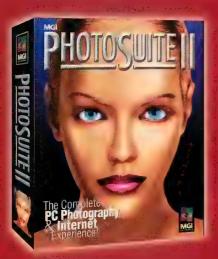
"Quite simply, there is nothing here that needs a computer or that isn't replicated in other software that most families will have, like Print Artist and Kid Pix," says Garth Janes Congmeadow, Mass. "There's no reason to buy this software if you have either of those."

Girls Only opens with an icon-filled representation of a girl's bedroom. Clicking the calendar on the wall opens the Personal Calendar, where girls can enter important dates and times, and view their schedule by day, week, or month. Though they liked this feature, girls expressed disappointment that the printed calendar displays only icons, not the schedule information they entered.

The program includes stripped-down, kidified variations on the personal information manager theme. The Address Book lets girls enter detailed information about friends and relatives, including e-mail addresses and birthdays, and the Secret Message Maker allows them to print out coded messages which can only be read with the included decoder tool. Stationery Creator is a very simple design program that lets girls write and print messages on custom stationery. The included clip art is anything but hip,

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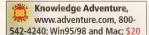
Singwand

according to our testers. "The graphics are childish," says 9-year-old Meghan Franco of Kentucky. "They look like they're for toddlers."

The main component of the program, the Secret Diary, received better reviews from girfs, who liked the ability to password-protect their personal thoughts and expressions. Girls can change the background, fonts, and colors of their journal to give entries a personalize feel, but that wasn't enough to win their favor. Overall, testers were disappointed in this product. "My daughter became bored on the third try," says Dorothy Pollock of Floral Park, N.Y. "She quickly tired of entering things. It simply was more work than fun to her."

Takeaway: Uninspired graphics, hard-to-use tools, and a low replay value closed the book on Secret Diary.

Go Fish



Go Fish, a freshwater fishing simulation for kids, cast a web around testers of all ages. Players choose bait, motor to a fishing hole, cast, reel, and wait for a bite, and this proved more than enough to get kids, parents, and even grandparents hooked.

"There's lots of action, strategy, and realism," says Daryl Gest of Carlsbad, Calif. "Even after doing a fair amount of fishing, [I learned] several things about working new tackle. My 7year-old daughter loved it, I loved it, and her non-computer-using Grandpa sneaked upstairs to play it by himself for hours."

Fishing expeditions start at the dock, where kids (or adults) can choose to start fishing right away, go on a fishing trip to one of six lakes, or enter a contest where the object is to catch the five biggest fish of one species before time runs out. The bird's-eye-view gives fisherman of all ages a great perspective of the water, and kids will have no trouble steering the boat and choosing between nine types of bait.

"I wanted to waste a lot of time fishing," says Michael Potts of Louisville, Ky. "There's enough variety in baits and locations to keep [kids] interested for a long time. With the music



SHARP ANGLE The bird's eye perspective helps make Go Fish easy and fun.

and commentary toned down, this could replace solitaire as favorite time-waster in the office."

The controls, like everything else in this game, are simple. To cast, you just move the cursor to where you want the line to drop, and click. To reel in, hold down on the left mouse button (some testers complained about some tingers and wrists after marathon fishing sessions). When you get a bite, you fight the fish by reeling in and pulling back on your pole. Be careful, though: Big fish—over 6 pounds—are tough to land without snapping your line.

Testers have a few ideas for improvement, but overall they couldn't resist the lure of this simple, fun simulation. "It would be more fun if there was more to do—like make my own lake and put fish that I want in it," says 6-year-old Cecilia Kavas of California. "It was a little boring sometimes, but my dad says that fishing is supposed to be boring."

Takeaway: Family Testers wouldn't let this one get away, praising it for fun and ease of use.

Kid Pilot



Kids typically love youth-sized versions of adult games because they give youngsters a taste of life as a grown-up. So Kid Pilot, a flight sim designed for children, makes perfect sense, right? Unfortunately, the folks at Knowledge Adventure veered off course with this program, and testers criticized both its graphics and its gameplay.

"The number of variables is [too] limited," says Debbie Henning of Virginia Beach, Va. "If there were more choices or more games in-





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YOU'RE GROUNDED Kid Pilot's limited gameplay options and so-so graphics make for a bumpy ride.

corporated into this program, it would hold my son's interest for longer periods."

Kids can choose from three different planes and dozens of airports and points of interest scattered throughout the United States. Although some parents said they liked the subtle geography information kids pick up while playing, they wished the program was more fun so that kids would play it long enough to learn something.

Kids can play in one of three difficulty levels. They can fly at various times of day and start either on a runway, high in the sky, or on approach for landing. While kids explore, they can take aerial photos, which are copied to their scrapbook, Testers were disappointed in

the low-quality graphics, especially compared with adult flight simulators, and said the plane was difficult to control.

"Kid Pilot proved a little boring for my 7year-old since he has used [adult-oriented] simulation games and because of the easy controls, limited number of planes, and the plain graphics of the cityscape." says Ron Zehnder of Prospect, Ky. "My 4-year-old really loved it, however."

Takeaway: Due to sub-standard graphics and limited gameplay options, this junior flight sim doesn't quite earn its wings.

The King and I: Animated Thinking Adventure

Sound Source Interactive, www.soundsourceinterac tive.com, 800-542-4240; Win95/98 and Mac; \$19.95

The King and I disappeared from movie screens pretty quickly this year, and according to our testers, the companion software is likely to follow suit. Although some of the games in this animated activity center are innovative, none of them lasts long enough or maintains kids' interest. The lack of a story and textured characters makes this just another collection of games set against a movie backdrop.

"There isn't any real character development within the software," says Mark Canner of Indianapolis. "Additionally, from an educational perspective, the games should change more each time. When you replay the game, each level begins exactly the same. Once your child wins, he or she loses interest in playing it again."

There are eight games in the program, each with multiple difficulty levels. Rama's Hot Air Rescue was a big favorite with our testers, allowing kids to use the mouse to fly a hot air balloon across a side-scrolling screen, picking up fuel, rescuing people, and avoiding obstacles along the way. Prince's Practice Match combines karate moves with a memory sequence game; Anna's Umbrella Game adds a cup-and-ball twist to the standard concentration game; and Tuptim's Mixed-Up Music

> challenges kids to arrange a jumbled series of musical measures. Louis's Floating Fireworks, a maze-puzzle game, features multiple levels too, and testers said it was a significant chal-

A chief complaint among Family Testers was that

none of the activities lasts beyond four levels, at which point the child is asked if he or she would like to play again. This, along with a lack of story details, led to a low replay score. Testers also wanted to be able to save games and log in as different users. On the other hand, several families enjoyed this simple activity center for what it is-a collection of arcade-type games for kids-and predicted their children would continue to use it, especially the younger ones.

"This is a nice game for children around 6 or 8 years old," says Patricia Overby of Chesterfield, Va. "Unlike educational software like the Jump-





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Start series, it provides more of a game-playing feel, yet it still teaches in a subtle way."

Takeaway: "Getting to know" this software is unlikely, due to limited replay value.

Winnie the Pooh and Tigger Too: Animated Storybook

Disney Interactive, www.disney

Interactive.com, 800-900-9234; Win95/98 and Mac: \$29.99



GARDEN VARIETY Pooh's pal Rabbit challenges youngsters with memory games.

In this latest installment in the Winnie the Pooh series, Tigger bounces into one adventure after another, much to the bother of Rabbit, Piglet, and the rest of the Hundred Acre Wood gang. Although this storybook leans heavily on these time-tested characters, parents and kids said its digital implementation was not on a par with past Disney Interactive titles.

"Overall it just seems awfully thin," says Gregory Pearson of Harrington Park, N.J., "The story is short. There are few items to click on, and the games are uninspired. My 4-year-old daughter liked it for a few days but quickly lost interest "

Kids can choose to hear the story from beginning to end, jump straight to a favorite page. or play one of four activities. Rabbit's Garden is a simple concentration game where kids match pairs of vegetables. Preschoolers took to the tictac-toe game against Roo, which features several skill levels and playful interaction with the young kangaroo. Everyone Bounce is a fastpaced memory game starring all of the characters from the story, and Icy Maze challenges kids to guide Pooh through a tricky maze in order to rescue Tigger.

Testers reported a few problems, "Too much talking and not enough games," says 4year-old Hunter Van Veghel of Connecticut, echoing the complaints of many who couldn't figure out how to interrupt long dialogs that start each page and game.

Testers also complained loudly about having to change their monitor to 256 colors before playing. Overall, families were charmed by Winnie the Pooh and Tigger Too, but not for long enough.

"It's too simple and basic," says Yvonne Smith of Pacoima, Calif. "There's not enough substance to hold a child's interest beyond the third time through. It's boring, according to my 4-year-old daughter, and she loves Winnie the Pooh and Tigger."

Takeaway: Low education and replay scores mean we can't recommend this title.

The Magic School Bus: Explores The World Of Animals



Microsoft. www.microsoft.com/kids, 800-426-9400: Win95/98 and Mac; \$24.95

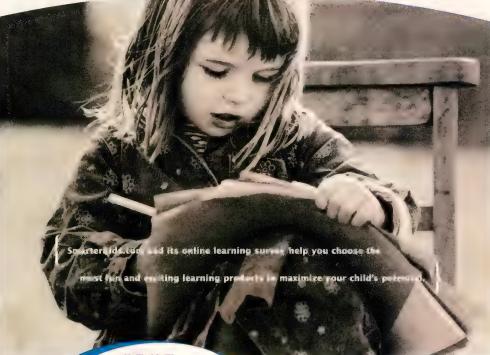
Ms. Frizzle's class is preparing for a low-key field trip to the local Wild Animal Park when word comes in that there's been a mix-up. Some animals have been put back into the wild, but in the wrong habitats. Always ready to help out, the class volunteers to travel around the globe and put the creatures back in their appropriate regions. Although testers liked this latest title in the Magic School Bus series, some questioned its replay value.

The game starts in the classroom, where kids can click just about anything to uncover an ac-



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Software

Microsoft's Driving Record

We've kept a close eye on the Microsoft Kids Magic School Bus series over the years. Here's how previous installments have fared in Family Testing.

Title FamilyTested Score

✓ MSB: Explores

the Solar System (1994) 90

✓ MSB: Explores the Ocean (1995) 80

 MSB: Explores in the Age of Dinosaurs (1996)

✓ MSB: Rain forest (1997)

82

87

tivity or surprise animation. Here you also can view any of the students' multimedia reports, which feature photos, narration, and videos about a variety of animals. When kids click on the door, Ms. Frizzle enters, announces the change in plans, and everyone piles into the bus for a "real" field trio.

From inside the bus, kids can hop to any of nine habitats to look for four misplaced animals among the illustrated habitat settings—a giraffe in the rain forest, for example—and catch them with their net. Other tools let kids listen to animal sounds, see animal skeletons, and zoom in on details. Some testers were disappointed that not all of the animals were linked to sounds and x-rays, and noted that the game lacks animal facts and photos. (The only photos and videos appear in the multimedia reports.)

Also scattered around the program are plenty of games and surprise animations. Our testers took to the morphing machine, which allows kids to mutate human characters into different animal forms. Kids also liked the foodchain sequence game, the animal footprincativity, and the animal camouflage game. Each game has multiple skill levels, and can accommodate novices as well as experienced players.

Kids generally liked this Magic School Bus title, but many parents questioned the game's long-term value and age-appropriateness. "The games became tedious after a while," says Donna Politzi of Oswego, N.Y. "I would liked to have seen more information concerning animals: where they live, what they eat. This game really just touched the surface."

Takeaway: Kids had fun and parents wanted more educational value for their \$24.95.

Mia: The Search for Grandma's Remedy



Mia is a very cute, very friendly little mouse who lives in a colorful, vividly realized 3D world. Her adventure begins when her grandmother gets sick and a mean rat named Romaine takes all her sparklies (shiny items that Mia uses as money in the store). Kids ages 5 to 9 are called upon to help Mia set things straight by exploring the virtual world and by playing a series of word-



ONE-WAY STREET Though visually arresting, Mia's linear plot lessens its replay value.

game activities. Family Testers were enchanted by the little mouse and her plight, but questioned the edutainment title's long-term value.

"The graphics are very realistic," says Donna Verna of Wallingford, Conn. "I can almost feel the texture of the wallpaper and the rugs."

Kids move Mia through her detailed environment by moving the mouse to the left or right. She walks slowly—sometimes agonizingly slowly according to several testers. As she strolls, kids click on the objects they encounter,



which launch a variety of activities. chiefly word games. There are nine activities in all, with multiple difficulty levels. They include a board game where kids match words to pictures, a rhyming game, a sentence-making game, and a word-building game where kids must use a slingshot to shoot the proper letters to complete a word. Most of these games earn kids a sparklie, which they can take to the store and trade for medicine for grandma.

Parents and kids liked the games, the adventure, and the wonderful graphics, but all agreed that once through, there was no compelling reason to return. "The educational games in it are very good and age appropriate, but it does not seem to have much replay value," says Scott Dix of Palmyra, N.Y. "There's only one particular way through the game and once you know it, it isn't hard to finish it. My son (age 6) didn't show much interest in playing it again once we were done."

Takeaway: The 3D technology is impressive, and the CD features good learning activities, but its linear story doesn't compel kids to return.



POLICE ACTION Spy Fox does what it takes to nab Russian Blue in this traditional acrade game.

Spy Fox in Cheese Chase



Humongous Entertainment,

www.humongous.com, 800-499-8386; Win95/98 and Mac; \$9.99

Russian Blue, an evil blue kitty, has swiped a hunk of famous cheese and Spy Fox must track her down in an assortment of vehicles, including a scooter, a boat, and a jet-ski. Cheese Chase is a classic arcade game along the lines of the old Spy Hunter title. Accordingly, most kids

thought it was great, and most parents just saw it as another video game.

The controls are simple: Use the arrows or the mouse to control Spy Fox's steering and acceleration as you weave around hazards and enemies on a scrolling screen, Running over (non-stinky) cheese increases your score. You also run over power-ups, like banana peels, used to knock enemies off course.

Kids can design their own levels with their own selections of hazards and power-ups, "We put a bunch of thugs in our level," says 6-yearold Adam Kroboth of Pennsylvania. "We had newspaper stands and cheese, gas, and weapons. You had to hold the mouse down the whole time to get all the thugs."

Parents were generally less enthusiastic in their responses. "This software is good strictly for fun. There's absolutely no educational value whatsoever," says Adam's mom, Judith Kroboth. "It's very addictive. I found that I had to really set limits on time spent playing. They would have played for hours without stopping. There's too much crashing and banging and blowing up of things for me, but my sons enjoyed it."



andows in Macinio

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Software

Takeaway: High in the fun category, this simple arcade driving game won over the 12-and-under crowd.

Laura's Happy Adventures

www.playmobil-interac tive.com, 800-824-7638; Win95/98 and Mac; \$19.99

Following in the footsteps of Tonka Joe, Barbie, and action figures everywhere, Playmobil people are making their way into the CD-ROM world. Laura's Happy Adventures, the first of many planned Playmobil titles, is an ambitious 3D adventure game for girls, but it didn't quite make the grade with testers. Although they liked its great graphics and gentle lessons about being helpful and nice, many had problems installing and running the software, and some questioned its age-appropriateness and long-term value.

"This game is cute and charming," says Lauren Reichel of Riverhead, N.Y. "I like the general theme of teaching the children good morals and to be good citizens. The game tends to have a calming atmosphere about it, and I hope it can continue to work this way for my children."

The story starts with Laura finding a talking gem in her grandfather's rock collection. The gem promises to be Laura's lucky charm if she can make people happy. With a child's help, Laura sets off to babysit her baby sister, deliver a note for her father, give a tramp a job, and more. The graphics in the game are on a par with the best 3D games for grown-ups, but similarly have heavy hardware needs. The program requires a Pentium 166, 32MB of RAM, and a 3D graphics card, but even some testers whose machines fit these specs could not get it to run. Many who did get it up and running complained of slow performance.

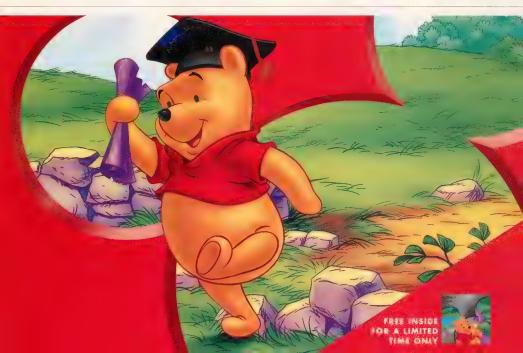
Sandra Mikesell of Mill Valley, Calif., also complained of a slow plot: "This game is deightful and it especially appeals to our soon-to-be-7-year-old girl," she says. "But [our daughter] finds it difficult and needs constant help to solve most puzzles. There needs to be more interaction with the surroundings when the game begins to interest the player in more than just walking around." Other testers comtains the property of the surrounding walking around." Other testers com-

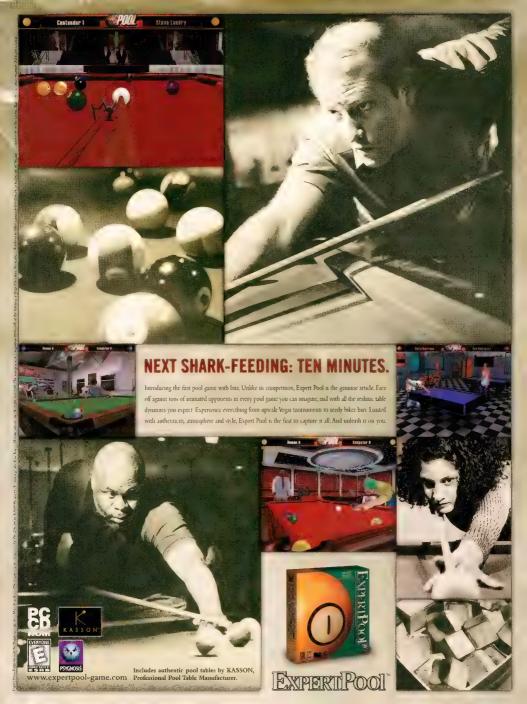


HOW SLOW CAN YOU GO? Pacing issues hindered Laura's Happy Adventures.

mented that there weren't enough characters to interact with, and that some characters were too passive (asking Laura to run errands but not doing anything themselves). Most significantly, parents felt that once the adventure was over, kids would not wish to repeat it because the story and activities are the same each time.

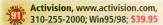
Takeaway: This Playmobil adventure game for little girls is high on system requirements and low on replay value.







Jack Nicklaus 6 Golden Bear Challenge



The latest installment in this venerable series boasts championship-level graphics (smooth golfer animation and lush, realistic surroundings for each of the six included courses), useful features (a wide range of difficulty levels and a great course designer), and solid gameplay. Plus, this CD-ROM was designed under the watchful eye of the Golden Bear himself. In other words, it's a gimme.

The default settings of Jack Nicklaus 6 can be quite challenging, but you can make the game more or less difficult to suit your tastes. Also, if you don't want to play as Jack himself, you can create your own golfer with varying skill levels (power, accuracy, and so forth).

The course list features Shoal Creek and The Sherwood Country Club, but if they don't hack it for you, check out the intuitive designer utility. With it, you can create your own putting greens and sand traps, and if you're still not satisfied, Jack Nicklaus 6 supports all of the courses de-



JACK'S BACK Jack Nicklaus 6 is a solid hit.

signed for Jack Nicklaus 5. Veterans will detect a few minor flaws, including limited mulligans (do-overs) and very short drives on the easiest difficulty setting, but these don't detract too much from the game. **Takeaway:** Not quite a hole in one, but definitely an eagle; ages 8 and up.

Links LS 1999



Great graphics, challenging gameplay, and an extensive library of addon courses make Links LS 1999 an attractive package for anyone who's serious about golf simulations. But be warned: This CD-ROM is not for beginners. Though it has some nice, forgiving touches (such as unlimited mulligans), the play in general is very realistic and hence very difficult. There's little in the way of on-screen guidance, so players need some preexisting knowledge of the sport (for instance, you'd better know the difference between a mashie and a niblick) in order to score below par.

The graphics in Links LS 1999 are very good, though the surrounding

hills and distant scenery can look a bit flat and fake at times. The courses themselves, on the other hand, are exceptionally well-designed and realistic. As for your on-screen avatar, you can step into the spiked shoes of Arnold Palmer or a generic male or female pro. And as an added bonus, Links LS 1999 supports all of the add-on courses from previous Links titles, including the multitude of Links 386 courses currently available.

Takeaway: The green fees are high, but this is a one-putt birdie; ages 12 and up.

Links Extreme



Microsoft, www.microsoft.com, 800-426-9400; Win95/98; \$34.95

Tired of traditional golf games? Links Extreme is a lighthearted take on the sport that adds wacky features to the existing Links LS game engine. Instead of regular tournament play on real-life courses, this game lets you knock the ball around a haunted green populated by ghosts and zombies. The game plays very much like Links LS 1999, but it's a whole lot easier to keep the ball on target, and it offers an amusing selection of trick balls. For instance, you can use the Rocket Ball to hit drives of 400 yards, while the Pin Tracker Ball will home in on the hole if it gets anywhere near the flag.

Links Extreme also includes some multiplayer options, including a somewhat distasteful "death match" set on a World War I battlefield. The demolition range, where you score points by hitting things with exploding golf balls, is a lot of fun at first, but gets pretty repetitive in short order. **Takeaway:** A solid par your first time through, a double bogey after that; ages 8 and up.

FGA Championship Golf 1999 Edition



Sierra Sports, www.sierrasports.com, 800-757-7707; Win95/98; \$29.95

PGA Championship Golf 1999 Edition isn't quite as impressive as Jack Nicklaus 6, but it's a solid all-around game that fits nicely between the hard-core realism of Links LS 1999 and the simplistic, arcade style of Electronic Arts' Tiger Woods series.

Like Jack Nicklaus 6, PGA Championship offers some stunning visuals (you'll want to have a picnic in the lush, verdant greens) and a set of realistic, well-designed courses. The program ships with seven tracks in all, including the sites of last year's PGA Championship (Sahalee Country Club) and British Open (Royal Birkdale Golf Club). Commentators Grant Boone and Mark Lye help create a TV-like experience, as do the customizable camera angles

Most aspects of this game are easy to master. Gamers of all skill levels should be able to jump right in and start playing—and playing well—without throwing down their virtual clubs in frustration. However, aiming your shots can be a bit confusing, since the on-screen display doesn't give you much guidance. Also, this game relies too heavily on Windows 95/98 windows and menus—these are great for an operating system, but they look terrible when you're trying to sink a putt.

Takeaway: A great birdie on a tough hole; ages 8 and up.

Committee Committee

Ultimate 8 Ball



THQ, www.thq.com, 818-225-5167; Win95/98; \$19.95

If you've always wanted a pool table but never had a room big enough to hold one, you can save a small fortune (and some valuable real estate) by playing virtual billiards on your PC instead. You'll get a similar experience, and you'll never have to crawl around on the floor searching for those little cubes of chalk.

Ultimate 8 Ball's aim is mostly true. The physics of this game are impeccable: The balls behave exactly the way you'd expect, with realistic caroms and rebounds. You're not limited to the vanilla 8 Ball game, either. You get a dozen variations in this package, including 9 Ball, Rotation, Speed, and Cut Throat. If you don't know how to play, a "School of Pool" offers a rundown of the rules and animated demos of a few dozen shots. The computerized coach who guides you through this process is helpful, but he sometimes shoots so quickly you can't follow his technique.

The game's other features are fairly standard: When you practice your own shots, you can enable a "training line" that shows the path the balls will take when hit. During competitive play, you can change the angle of your stick and add English to spin the ball around an obstacle on the table. Also, in a strange twist on the real billiards experience, aiming with precision is easy but hitting your shots with power is very difficult: We tried to start every game with an explosive break, but our opening shots produced whimpers instead of bangs.

Takeaway: Not perfect, but this solid sim will only set you back \$20; ages 8 and up.

—Dave Johnson

MechWarrior 3



MicroProse, www.mechwarrior3.com, 800-656-5443; Win95/98; \$49.95

Feeling small, meek, insignificant? Try climbing into the cockpit of a hulking, heavily armed 'Mech, and see if that doesn't boost your self-image. MicroProse's MechWarrior3 puts you in the middle of a 31st-century war between giant robots, and yes, the side with the most artillery wins.

The original MechWarrior helped define the futuristic shoot-'emup category, while its sequel, MechWarrior 2, introduced graphic realism



'MECH MY DAY MechWarrior 3 is a total blast.

to the genre. Both were bestsellers, and thanks to fantastic pyrotechnics and smooth gameplay, MechWarrior 3 looks like another success.

As the pilot of one of these two-legged battle tanks, you fight your way through 20-plus missions, most of which involve obliterating enemy forces

and installations. Fortunately, you don't have to stomp solo: You can order your "lancemates" to attack other targets or fight alongside you. The garne also features multiplayer options, so you can square off against friends and family over a home network or against strangers on the Internet.

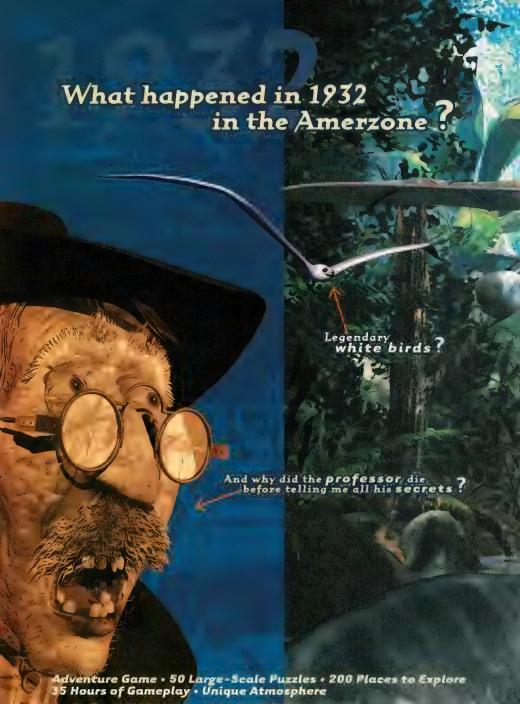
While MechWarrior 3 is first and foremost an action game, it boasts some compelling strategic elements. For instance, you can't just blast everything in sight: Your 'Mech has a limited amount of firepower, and certain weapons must recharge before you can use them again. What's more, firing generates heat, and too much heat can result in damage or even a total shutdown.

MechWarrior 3's sound and visual effects are spectacular, though you'll need a 3D graphics card to really enjoy the latter. You'll also need a relatively powerful system (we recommend at least a 233MHz Pentium II) and a really good joystick. If you've got the goods, get this game. It's one of the most enjoyable shooters in recent memory.

Takeaway: No blood or gore, just white-knuck-led, giant-robot action.

---Rick Broida





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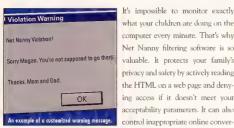


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Yoot Tower



Sega PC, www.yoottower.com, 800-USA-SEGA: Win95/98 and Mac: \$39.95

We always expect game seguels to improve upon the originals, but in the case of Yoot Tower, our expectations hit the payement with a thud.

In Yoot Tower, a sequel to SimTower, players build and maintain an enormous skyscraper, with the aim of turning a profit, keeping tenants and visitors happy, and earning a coveted five-star rating. We wish Yoot

Tower's development team had kept the same sort of objectives in mind, Instead. the dated graphics, poorly translated Japanese-to-English text, cheesy music, and game-crashing bugs make this the architectural equivalent of a condemned building. Setup is also a chore, since you have to manually revert to a 256-color desktop display.

What's a Yoot? No, this isn't an obscure reference to the film Mv Cousin Vinny. "Yoot" is the nickname for the designer of Yoot Tower and SimTower, Yutaka Saito, Since Sega PC doesn't have legal rights to the Sim-Tower name, the company went with Yoot Tower instead.

Veteran SimTower players may detect

a couple of minor improvements. Yoot Tower has three new locations— Tokyo, Waikiki, and Kegon Falls—and aside from just managing shops. offices, hotel rooms, and restaurants, there's a stronger emphasis on the residents themselves. This introduces a welcome human quotient into a physics-heavy title, but it's not enough. Overall, Yoot Tower is a lackluster building sim, constructed with flimsy materials and standing on shaky ground.

Takeaway: If you want a deep, entertaining strategy/sim, pick up Sim-City 3000 instead. -Marc Saltzman

Apache Havoc



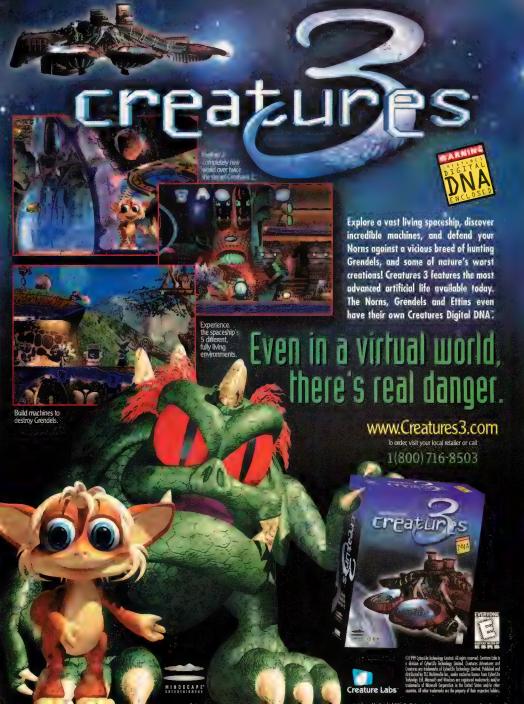
Empire Interactive, www.empire-us.com, 800-216-9706; Win 95/98; \$45

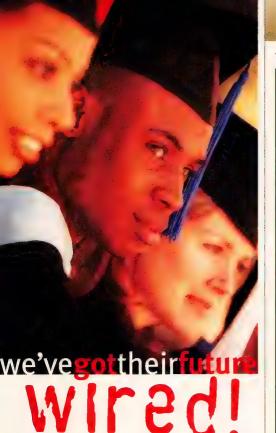
Apache Havoc lets you take the controls of two different attack choppers, the U.S. AH-64D Apache Longbow or the Russian Mil-28N Havoc B. In each conflict, U.S. and Russian (or Russian-backed) forces go headto-head, so if you fly the Apache you fight for U.S. interests while Havoc pilots buzz and strafe for

Mother Russia. The graphics in this game are excellent, as are the sound effects and music, all of which contribute to an immersive simulated flight experience. That said, we have deep misgivings about the rating, and you should preview this game before your kids take flight.

Takeaway: Between the questionable geopolitics and the random cursing, your kids may be better off watching CNN. -Michael E. Ryan

Sometimes you have to wonder how PC games are evaluated by the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (the organization that sticks those "E" for "Everyone," "T" for "Teen," and "M" for "Mature" tags on 80 percent of software boxes). In Apache Havoc, not only do players engage in virtual combat over actual countries like Cuba. Laos, and Thailand, but the in-flight radio emits intermittent bursts of profanity-one such gem being "So many a******, so little time." Inexplicably, the ESRB gave this title an "E" rating, but it's definitely not appropriate for your youngsters.





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Family**PC** GameGuard A Closer Look at Content

Your kids will be asking for these games, but are they appropriate? Here's what you need to know. For more titles, visit www.familypc.com.

Aliens Versus Predator

Fox Interactive, www.foxinteractive.com, \$49.95 **ESRB Rating:** Mature

Story: If you've seen the movies, you know the drill. In this intense, first-person, Doom-style action game, you can play as a gun-toting Marine, a head-biting Alien, or a trophy-hunting Predator.

Sex: None

Violence: Blood flows freely, whether it's green, yellow, or red. Lots of decapitation and dismemberment.

Language: The marines curse like marines.

Austin Powers: Operation Trivia

Sierra Online, www.opera tiontrivia.com. \$24.95 ESRB Rating: Teen

Story: This fast-paced game from the makers of You Don't Know Jack centers on trivia from both Austin Powers movies, as well as pop-culture references from the '60s through to the '90s.

Sex: Yeah, baby. Just like the movie, this CD-ROM is full of thinly veiled innuendo and kooky sexual code words. It's actually a bit tamer than the film, though, since it lacks the corresponding visuals.

Violence: None

Language: No swearing, but parents may find some of the references difficult to explain to their kids.

Ring

Mindscape, www.mindscape.com, \$39.99 ESRB Rating: Teen

Story: This Myst-style adventure game is based on Richard Wagner's epic Ring Cycle. You play as four characters (Brunhilde, Loge, Siegmund, and Alberich), solving various puzzles to the strains of the operatic score, courtesy of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra.

Sex: Some suggestive nudity and provocative costumes.

Violence: Lots of battles, but no blood.

Language: Nothing objectionable — just the usual Sturm und Drang.



SOMEWHERE, GEORGE HAD MADE A MISTAKE, His Catalan opening ball been flavious. Yes

as supporent had forced his retreat and now held him in check. With his only remaining rook lurge out of position and men

the situation appeared hopeless. This isn't Chessmaster, he thought, there is no replay option in this game. His mine

raced back to the magnificent chess sets of Chessmaster. The lessons learned. The gambits and endgame strate.com

the Chessmaster opponents against whom he had matched wits and sharpened his game, as he progressed through

tutorials in various levels. The voice of the Chessmaster, coaching him. And suddenly, in his hour of geed, he heard

the voice again: "Counterattack in the center... N-Q4." Why hadn't be seen it before?









MINBSCAPE







Chessmaster 6000 is still available for PC CD-ROM. Look for Chessmaster 7000 for PC CD-ROM this fall.

For more information, check out www.chessmaster.com



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Quick Read

nless you like standing in line or wandering through the aisles, there's no reason to set foot in a bookstore again. The Internet teems with book vendors, ranging from giants like Amazon.com to small, regional players looking to extend their reach. Given the online book-buying craze, we put five outlets to the test by ordering titles from each. Most did just fine, and each store had our randomly selected titles in stock, All of these merchants offer discounts. and all use more or less the same ordering process: Just fill out your e-mail and shipping addresses, make your selections, zap over your credit-card number, and you're done. For the purposes of our test, we opted for "standard shipping," which promises delivery within 3 to 7 working days—but actual delivery dates varied considerably, as you can see. -Bob Strauss

www.amazon.com

Ordered: Visions of Jazz: The First Century, by Gary Giddins

Price: \$24.50 (30% discount)

Shipping: \$3.95 Delivery: 2 days

Navigation: Amazon is looking a bit overstuffed these days. But the search engine made it easy to zero in on our tome of choice.

Coolest click: Readers' reviews run underneath the book blurbs.

211-6111 www.bn.com

Ordered: Personal History, by Katharine Graham; Who's Irish?, by Gish Jen Price: \$12 (20% discount); \$15.40 (30%

discount) Shipping: \$4.90 Delivery: 1 day Navigation: Like Amazon.com, barnes

andnoble.com tends to overwhelm visitors with a catchall home

page. Still, the handy

search engine makes shopping a snap.

Coolest click: There are live chats with authors such as Larry King and Henry Kissinger.

www.borders.com

Ordered: Murder at Heartbreak Hospital, by Henry Slesar; The Ground Beneath Her Feet, by Salman Rushdie

Price: \$14.70 (30% discount): \$22 (20% discount), \$14.31 (20% discount)

Shipping: \$4.90 Delivery: 4 days Navigation: The clean, comprehensible layout lends itself well to impulse buying, and a feature called In the News lets visitors browse books based on current events.

Coolest click: KidzKorner in the NetCafe' has contests, stories, and monitored chats.

www.books.com

Ordered: Bird by Bird, by Anne Lamott; One Last Time by John Edward

Price: \$10.31 (20% discount): \$14.31 (20% discount)

Shipping: \$4.90 Delivery: 7 days

Navigation: The search engine is a bit unreliable, and the layout is low-voltage.

Coolest click: In the Cafe', literati can post messages in fiction, romance, and poetry forums.

www.booksnow.com

Ordered: Home Town, by Tracy Kidder Price: \$23.36 (10% discount) Shipping: \$4.95 Delivery: 10 days

> Navigation: This site's Spartan design makes it fairly easy to find your favorite book.

> > Coolest click: The Bargain Basement

has 50% discounts on older titles



Web**Sitings**

Fitness Sites

Let's Get Physical

Staying fit during the summer is a breeze: Sunday visits to the park, weekend hiking trips, and even aerobic gardening (we're not kidding about this one; check out www.ritecode.com/aerobicgardening) keep us active. But when chilly October winds begin to blow, we tend to retreat indoors for some low-impact reclining. So we turned to the Internet for some perspiration inspiration. Here are a few of our favorite sites.

FitnessLink

www.fitnesslink.com

Part personal trainer, part M.D., and part exercise-encyclopedia, FitnessLink is a good place to begin planning a healthy routine. If you can't find the article you need on-site, you can browse through links divided into categories including MindLinks, NutriLinks, and MuscleLinks. Each linked site is rated (1 to 4 barbells) for content reliability. For anyone considering an at-home fitness routine, FitnessLink reviews exercise TV shows and home videos. And busy parents who barely have time to bend down and tie their own shoelaces will appreciate an article on 30-minute workouts, as well as the kids' fitness section.

Coolest Click: The Mind/Body section lists the medicinal benefits of some popular herbs.

Phys

www.phys.com

Conde Nast's health and fitness site is like a sleek, well-equipped gym complete with juice bar and massage services. Mixing original content with articles from *Self* magazine, Phys focuses on getting you in shape and looking good. You can click on the





treadmill. Tufts University experts are available to answer your questions, including advice on the kinds of fat you should avoid and tips on taking vitamins. For extra support, check out the Community Forum where visitors commiserate over the ups and downs of a healthy lifestyle. Topics here range from Fitness 101 to Eating for Energy to Cut the Fat, which features low-fat cooking secrets. Keeping you on track from head to toe, the site's fitness gear section even has a searchable database that assists you in finding the perfect pair of sneakers.

Coolest Click: The Strength and Flexibility Slide Show walks (OK, jogs) you through a simple workout routine.

Shape Up America

body into good health.

www.shapeup.org

Dr. C. Everett Koop, who founded Shape Up America in 1994, believes that it just makes sense to get fit and who can argue? This no-frills site guides you through the oftenconfusing land of diet and fitness with a stern, authoritative voice. Over at the CyberKitchen, you enter your height, weight, and activity level, so you can personalize a weight plan and stick to it. There are even vegetarian and budget options available.

Coolest Click: In the library section 99 Tips for Family Fitness Fun offers advice on getting every-

-Emily Friedlander

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Female Premiums

Age	10	15	20	25	30
	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR
35	\$ 103	\$ 125	\$ 145	\$ 183	\$ 205
40	\$ 123	\$ 158	\$ 185	\$ 238	\$ 260
45	\$ 190	\$ 215	\$ 253	\$ 330	\$ 385
50	\$ 253	\$ 290	\$ 363	\$ 490	\$ 495
55	\$ 365	\$ 413	\$ 550	\$ 835	\$ 1,015
60	\$ 503	\$ 615	\$ 845	\$ 2,135	\$ 2,400
65	\$ 775	\$ 975	\$1,593	\$ 3,900	\$ 3,900
70	\$1,338	\$ 1,600	\$2,970	\$ 7,220	\$ 7,220
75	\$2,275	\$ 4,870	\$5,820	\$10,370	\$12,420

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 The first to make available this new custom -search service." Nation's Business
- "Get quotes on the spot. New source for best buys in insurance. One way to get to know the market." - Kiplinger's Personal Finance
- "Quotesmith.com provides rock-bottom quotes. Forbes

Male Premiums

Age	10	15	20	25	30
	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR
35	\$ 123	\$ 138	\$ 165	\$ 223	\$ 253
40	\$ 148	\$ 183	\$ 225	\$ 288	\$ 335
45	\$ 225	\$ 300	\$ 360	\$ 450	\$ 513
50	\$ 338	\$ 455	\$ 525	\$ 743	\$ 828
55	\$ 500	\$ 670	\$ 768	\$ 1,640	\$ 2,330
60	\$ 783	\$ 990	\$1,335	\$ 3,630	\$ 3,630
65	\$1,330	\$ 1,650	\$2,693	\$ 5,250	\$ 5,250
70	\$2,473	\$ 3,175	\$4,860	\$ 8,790	\$ 8,790
75	\$4,400	\$ 7,443	\$9,600	\$13,260	\$15,030

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 Los Angeles Times
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WebSitings

■ Halloween Sites

Favorite Haunts



he World Wide Web offers dozens of family-friendly sites that give trick-or-treaters tips about parties, pumpkins, and Halloween-themed recipes. Even better, you'll find a dazzling array of ghoulish GIFs and all manner of monstrous multimedia. Here are five sites that should send you and your family screaming, delightedly, into the night

Halloween Recipes

SOAR Berkeley EDU/recipes/ holiday/halloween/

A glance at the recipe index tells you what to expect: everything from Ghoul-Ade to Pathology Pound Cake. Most of these horrifying but often nutritous snacks, which are collected from a variety of cookbooks, are guaranteed to put your family in the seasonal spirit. Your kids may enjoy cooking them even more than eating them. Our favorites: Bloody Eyeballs on the Rocks (radishes, pinnentos, tomato juice) and Pus Pockets (pita, mozzarella cheese, ketchup).

Trick or Treat or Test Prep

www.kaplan.com/holiday/ halloween

The folks at Kaplan know all about preparing for standardized tests, but who knew they have a sense of humor about it? This page offers Halloween-themed practice SAT questions (from the sentence-completion category: "It was surprising to see the witch eat the_____ because it was assumed she was a ____ "), a list of Voca-BOO-lary words (including "fetid" and "incar-

nadine"), and advice to "reach impor-

Pumpkins & More

www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/ pumpkins/index.html

This Internet pumpkin portal points visitors to sites that describe the history, nutritional value, and agricultural requirements of the big orange fruit. (Those of us in the know call it "cucurbita pepo.") Plus, a Question & Answer section gives the lowdown on such pressing inquiries as, "How can I grow pumpkins that weigh more than 100 pounds?" (Hint: you won't be able to do it on your windowsill.) Want to make the most of your post-holiday Jack-O-Lantern? Check out the Pumpkin-Ameretto Cheesecake recipe.



Ghostwalk

www.meddybemps.com/ halloween/ghostwalk.html

Here's one for the kids: an interactive ghostwalk through the magical land of Chateau Meddybemps, where fairies lurk behind trees and green-horned monsters hide in dark, mysterious ponds. As you click your way through each page, you can stop and point your mouse on windows, foliage, and other spots to reveal the ghosts and goblins that lurk behind them. At the end of your trek, pay a visit to Tippity Witch's Windmill house for some spooky stories.

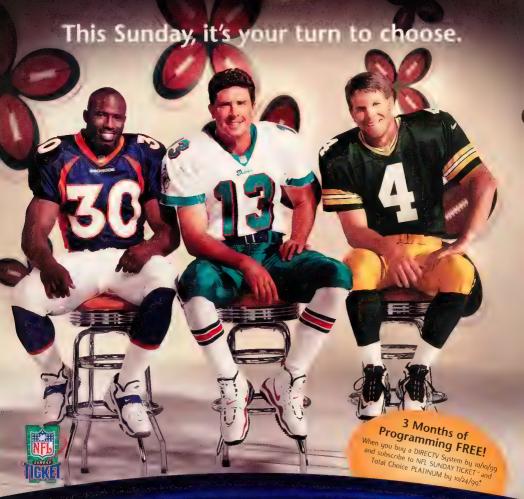
Cemetery Pictures

med-pharm53.bu.edu/pages/ cemeteries.html

Some tourists take snapshots of bridges and waterfalls; others tote their digital cameras to graveyards. On this page, you can download pictures of famous cemeteries in Italy, England, Austria, and the U.S., courtesy of a Web-savvy couple who seem genuinely enthralled by these "quiet and lovely places." And when you're done looking, you can read up on the symbolism of gravestone markers, such as, "crossed swords indicate death in battle."

—Bob Strauss.

tant life ghouls."



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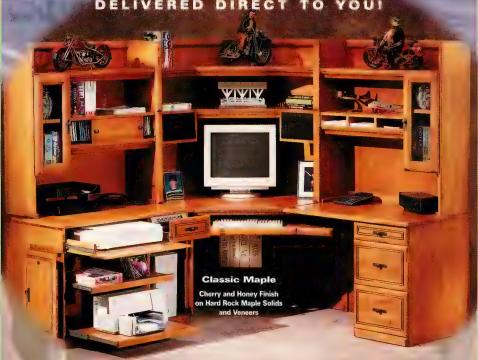
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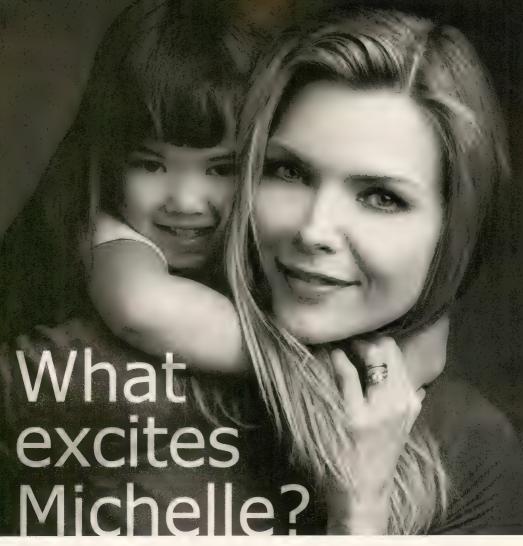
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Michelle Pteiffer gets a thrill from a child's first smile, first steps and first words. She also knows it's essential to interact with children by talking, singing, reading or simply hugging—especially during the crucial first three years, when their brains grow to 90% of their adult size. That's why Michelle supports "I Am Your Child," an initiative providing important child development information to parents and caregivers. Which is exactly what you'll find at firstyears excite com—a resource for those who are looking for critical facts and guidance on child development. What's more, when you personalize your Excite start page at www.excite.com, Excite will donate \$2 to "I Am Your Child"—which should excite anyone who cares about kilds.







Talk about blessed unions: October is both computer learning month (www.computerlearning.org) and family history month, so why not dig into your family roots by building a tree on the PC? You can get started at www.genealogy.com, www.cyndislist.com, or www.familysearch.org.



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